Belonging in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*

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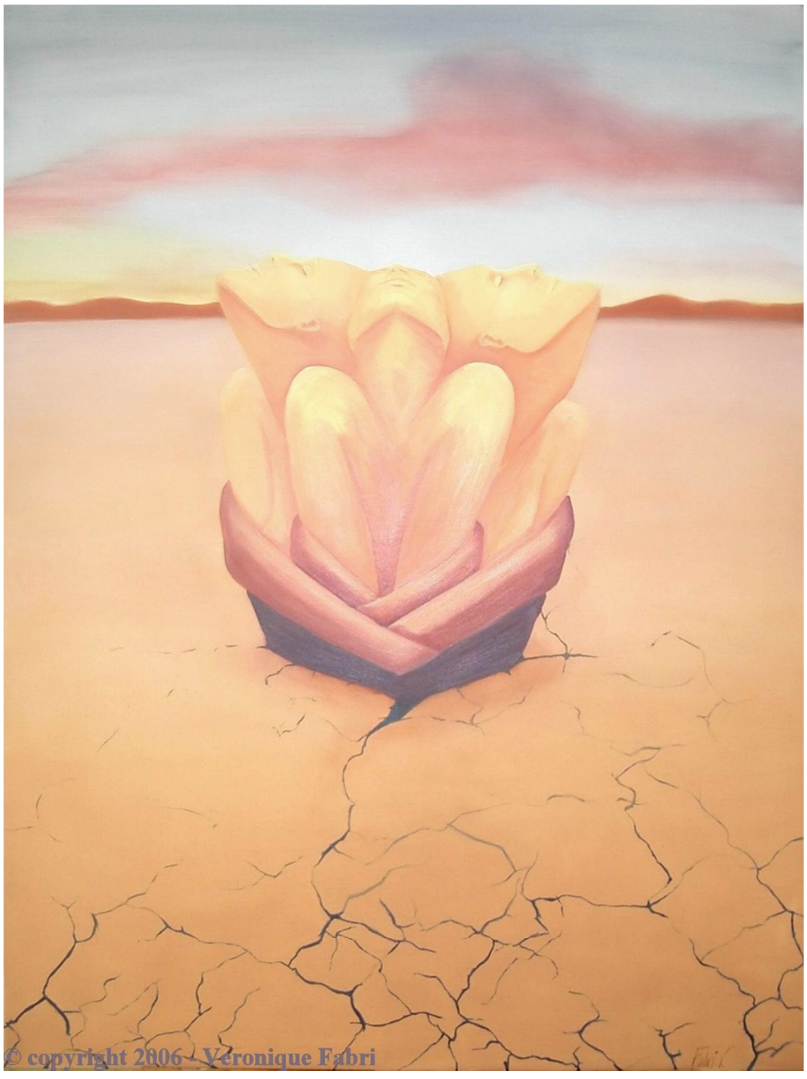

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the characters' sense of belonging in the novel *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje. The idea is that the characters all have a sense of belonging before they arrive at the Villa San Girolamo. This belonging, though, is wounded and they are all in need of healing. The healing process seems to start as they relate to each other in the villa and begin to form new ties. However, this new belonging is not strong enough to uphold relations after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombings in the end result in a re-establishing of most of the characters' original belonging to their nations or home countries. For a while, the novel communicates the idea of a form of global belonging, with the villa as a microcosm. This type of belonging seems to imply an imagined global community. The thesis asks how the characters' sense of belonging is problematized in the novel and how this problematizing affects the various levels of community.

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Oslo, May 2012
Malin Furuholm

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Introduction

The English Patient is a novel that is both seemingly universal in its themes, and local in its setting. Set in a small villa in post-war Italy, the novel develops themes such as love, friendship and healing, themes which may be related to all peoples of the world. This puts the novel firmly within the field of world literature. According to David Damrosch, a leading theorist of world literature, a novel 'can enter world literature by embodying what are taken to be universal themes and values, so that local cultural detail can be considered secondary or even irrelevant.'[1] In my opinion, this is certainly the case with *The English Patient*. Through its development of themes of general relevance, the importance of the locality of the narration is diminished. The locality is not crucial for the story to convey its universality. The characters' relationships to each other, however, take on primary importance. These relationships embody and hint at world issues that may be relevant for readers of world literature. The novel caught the attention of readers across the world in 1992 when it was awarded the Man Booker Prize for Fiction. The award's website notes that 'The Man Booker judges are selected from the country's finest critics, writers and academics to maintain the consistent excellence of the prize.' This seems to be a promise of quality which is acknowledged across the world. The website also notes that the Man Booker Prize for Fiction guarantees 'both the winner and the shortlisted authors […] a worldwide readership plus a dramatic increase in book sales.'[2] In short, winning this prestigious award also opened the doors to a worldwide audience and aligned Michael Ondaatje with some of the greatest writers of our time.

What I found interesting when first reading the novel was the characters' ability to form a new home in the Villa San Girolamo. Here, they develop, intentionally or not, a new sense of belonging to each other, a belonging that transcends their former loyalties to their home countries. Belonging is a theme that is universally relevant. Everyone comes from somewhere and most people feel a belonging to some place or other. Though people may not live in their birthplace, they may still have a sense of belonging to it. Nevertheless, a person's sense of belonging may also change, loyalties may shift, and the original sense of belonging may have disappeared completely in favour of another.

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[1] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 213.
[2] *The Man Booker Prizes*, URL: http://www.themanbookerprize.com/prize/about (accessed 13 May 2012).

The theme of belonging in the novel can be clearly related to the author's own personal history. The parallel between Michael Ondaatje's life and the situation of the characters is at least worth some brief introductory remarks. Ondaatje was born in Sri Lanka, but due to the separation of his parents he moved to England with his mother at the age of eleven. After having returned to Sri Lanka briefly, Ondaatje moved from England to Canada where he now lives.[3] He describes the relocations in an interview with Eleanor Wachtel: 'They were all traumatic moves for me, but I don't think I showed it very much.'[4] To be moved around at such an early age must have made an impact on the author. Friends may have been lost, and new ones might have been hard to find. By moving around and in the end settling down in Canada, Ondaatje's sense of belonging has changed from when he first came to England. He now identifies himself as Canadian rather than Sri Lankan or English, since Canada was the place where he grew into his authorship.[5] Ondaatje describes the characters in his novel *The English Patient* as wanting a sense of belonging: 'Those migrants don't belong here [in the villa] but want to belong here and find a new home.'[6] Like Ondaatje, who found a new home in Canada, the characters are looking for a home for themselves in a strange place far away from their home countries. As part of their reading experience, other readers of the novel may relate to this and perhaps find parallels to their own situations in life.

The characters' sense of belonging in the villa is a complex one and a brief synopsis of the plot may be necessary for the sake of clarity. Set in the Villa San Girolamo in the Italian countryside, the story is about four characters trying to make a living in the aftermath of the Second World War. The story is centred on the enigma of the English patient whose identity is unknown. Hana, a Canadian nurse, stayed with him in the villa after he was left behind by the Allies since he was too weak to move. They are joined by Caravaggio, a Canadian-Italian thief and spy for the Allies and an old friend of Hana's father, and Kip, an Indian Sikh who is a sapper in the British army. They all come from different places with different national backgrounds, and they all have wounds to heal from the war, but together they interact and form relations similar to those of a family. The relative idyll of the villa is, however, towards the end broken by the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This event reopens wounds that may have healed in the villa and the characters' relations to each other become tense. Furthermore, according to the views of the author, the characters' relationships to their home

[3] Eleanor Wachtel, 'An Interview with Michael Ondaatje', in *Essays on Canadian Writing 53: Michael Ondaatje Issue*, eds., Jack David and others (Oakville: ECW Press Ltd., 1994), pp. 250-61 (p. 250).
[4] Wachtel, p. 259.
[5] Ibid., p. 260.
[6] Ibid.

countries are also strained: 'In *The English Patient* everyone is fearful of going home. Hana's fearful, and the Patient hates the idea of home and nations, and Kirpal Singh has been befriended and is enamoured of certain English things for a while. They don't want to go back to where they were from.'[7] The characters' sense of belonging is, in other words, confused to begin with. They are wounded after the war and either not ready to go home, or not willing to acknowledge that they have a home. Though their belonging becomes centred on life in the villa, it is not strong enough to survive the bombings of the Japanese cities. The bombings test the small community by pushing Kip to the limits of his passive acceptance of Western civilization. His rebellion in the villa in turn affects the characters' belonging to their home countries as those who can choose to return home in the end.

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the characters' sense of belonging. To pursue this aim, I will look at how the limits of their belonging are transcended and overcome in order to form a new one in a new community. The historical events and world values presented in the novel seem to give the story a global perspective, in addition to its local setting. In this respect, the characters' sense of belonging may also be represented in the idea of a global community. How, then, is the characters' sense of belonging problematized in the novel and how does this problematizing affect the various levels of community? Due to the scope of this thesis I found it necessary to limit the investigation to a close reading of the novel where I draw upon theories and secondary literature as explained below. In the case of Kip and the patient, it is necessary with a preliminary observation on how I choose to refer to them. I have used the patient's name, Almásy, only when referring to him as a person with a known identity. Otherwise, he will be referred to as 'the patient' or 'the English patient'; that is, when he represents a personage of unknown identity or when I discuss his role as a representation of the West and Western civilization and humanism. Kip will be referred to by his Indian name, Kirpal Singh, when he has found back to his Indian belonging. The reason for his change of name is to signal his return to his original identity as Indian. Also, the term 'community' needs some explanation. I have used this term to refer to a gathering of people in a certain place. In the case of the 'local community', the term refers to the four characters in the Villa San Girolamo and their social interaction. By the term 'global community' I refer to how the local community may be seen as an abstraction which in this case represents global unity. This will be further explained in the section on theories and also in the respective chapters where necessary.

[7] Wachtel, p. 260.

Theories and Methodology

The theoretical framework of this thesis is eclectic; my analysis is not informed by one single theory. Instead, I considered it sufficient to apply various theories to support my analysis. As a way into the theme of belonging, I found David Damrosch and Peter Madsen's theories on world literature relevant when explaining the theme's global applications. Damrosch's theory on how to categorize world literature has formed the background for analysing belonging as a theme that is relevant when considering the novel's wide reception. In his book *What Is World Literature?,* Damrosch states: 'I take world literature to encompass all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language.'[8] To put it differently, world literature is literature that may be received not only in its own culture, but also across a particular culture's borders. The literary work's thematic relevance makes it receivable in other cultures regardless of its origin. The thematic relevance in *The English Patient* is of such interest that it may be read by a worldwide audience. In *How to Read World Literature,* Damrosch mentions a narrative strategy called a 'glocal' narrative: 'In literature, glocalism takes two primary forms: writers can treat local matters for a global audience – working outward from their particular location – or they can emphasize a movement from the outside world in, presenting their locality as a microcosm of global exchange.'[9] The first form of glocalism, where local issues are presented to a worldwide audience, is, in this case, of lesser relevance. The second form, on the contrary, is of particular interest as it presents global issues in a local setting, making the local setting a smaller representation of the world. To support and explain the novel's relevance as world literature, I investigate how the narrative presents the second form of glocalism in chapter 2 of this thesis.

The novel's position as a work of world literature can be further supported by Madsen's definition of globalization. Madsen notes that the globalization process is ambiguous in that it has both negative and positive effects on a globalized community. The negative effects may appear as the exclusion of certain cultural traits in favour of shared values. The positive effects, however, may include shared values and the promotion of these as a common aim for all nations.[10] Madsen's definition forms the basis for my arguments in chapters 2 and 3 for opening up a global perspective on the theme of belonging. In the novel,

[8] David Damrosch, *What Is World Literature?*, p. 4.
[9] Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 109.
[10] Peter Madsen, 'World Literature and World Thoughts: Brandes/Auerbach', in *Debating World Literature*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 54-75 (p. 73).

belonging becomes a global theme promoted as a shared value in the local community. By sharing a sense of belonging, the characters may be seen to represent the promotion of such values in a global perspective, for the common good of all nations.

As the characters have different nationalities, it seems natural that they also, perhaps with the exception of the patient, have a sense of belonging to their respective nations. In order to explain this belonging I have drawn upon the theory of imagined communities by Benedict Anderson. Anderson explains that a nation is an 'imagined community' made imaginable by capitalism, the printing presses and, to a certain degree, the variety of languages.[11] The growth of capitalism, then, and the use of the printing presses in a print-language nourished the feeling of community and belonging across territorial distances. The printing press, and nowadays other media, made communication possible in a given language, and people who read the print would come to feel a belonging to other people with the same language, even though they would never come to know each other in person. They would imagine themselves to be part of a shared community greater than the local community of their neighbourhood. Also, Anderson's definition of a nation as an 'imagined community' beyond whose boundaries lie other imagined communities, or nations, may be of further relevance: 'it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship.'[12] The fact that a community is imagined as a comradeship makes it possible, in my opinion, to apply this theory as an explanation for how the characters seem to belong to not only their own original imagined communities, or nations, but also to form a belonging to each other in the villa. This type of imagined community may, in addition, be transferrable to the image of the characters seen as pushing towards the idea of an imagined global community for a while.

Though Anderson's theory may be useful when discussing the characters' belonging to their imagined communities, it does not cover the way in which the characters come to relate to each other in the villa. That is, as something reminiscent of a family. I have, however, found the sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies's thoughts on what he calls *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* of interest in this regard. These two terms define two different forms of community. *Gemeinschaft* may be seen as a family, a Community, into which you are born. The relations in *Gemeinschaft*, then, are based on family bonds or blood relations.

[11] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 42-3.
[12] Anderson, pp. 6-7.

Gesellschaft, in contrast, may be seen as a market place, a Society. The latter is a form of community where people are, more or less, indifferent to each other. The only relation they have is of business, not only in buying and selling, but also in the interaction between people of different families in everyday life: 'Community means genuine, enduring life together, whereas Society is a transient and superficial thing. Thus, *Gemeinschaft* must be understood as a living organism in its own right, while *Gesellschaft* is a mechanical aggregate and artefact.'[13] To put it differently, *Gemeinschaft* may be seen as a family community, while *Gesellschaft* may be explained as a society made up of family communities. The idea that the characters may relate to each other as a family in the villa may also be based on the idea of them forming a *Gemeinschaft*. Although they are not family in blood, it can still be argued that they imagine themselves as a family. This is also something Ondaatje has reflected on when he notes that 'the nuclear family is replaced by a kind of extended family [in the villa].'[14] The traditional family institution, in other words, with its mother and father and their two children, has been replaced by a wider representation of family. Even though there are no blood relations in this representation, it still has the appearance of a family.

The colonial presence in the novel, as represented by Kip, directs the attention to post-colonial terms such as the 'Other' and 'colonial hybridity'. Hana may also represent this dimension, as she is from a former colony as well, but her identity and belonging are tied to Western civilization to begin with and thus does not provide the contrast between East and West the same way Kip does. To support my analysis of Kip as an 'Other' and a 'colonial hybrid', I have used the theories of Edward W. Said and Homi K. Bhabha. In *Orientalism*, Said argues that people who live together in a given place may tend to think in the dichotomous terms of 'us' and 'they', consequently putting up boundaries between two given peoples which may, or may not, be accepted by either party. These boundaries create an 'Other' by which the 'us' party may define itself.[15] Bhabha further explores this idea of an 'Other', but argues that the definition is not as binary as in Said's version. Rather, Bhabha notes that 'the [colonial] stereotype is a complex, ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation, as anxious as it is assertive, and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself.'[16] The 'Other' is not only one of 'them', but a type of complex representation. This representation does not

[13] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 18.
[14] Wachtel, p. 259.
[15] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 54.
[16] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 100.

conform to one single definition. Rather, it needs to be analysed from different points of view in order to cast light on its various characteristics. These theories of the 'Other' may help the analysis of Kip's cultural identity where his identity as Indian comes into conflict with his English identity. Furthermore, according to Bhabha, who is, perhaps, the most well-known theorist on the subject of colonial hybridity, the colonial hybrid is the result of discriminatory effects imposed on the colonized by colonialist authority.[17] By discriminating certain cultural traits, colonialist authority sought to civilize the uncivilized and maintain its authority based on its superiority. This discrimination based on cultural identity resulted in a hybridization of one's original culture and the one imposed, thus producing a new cultural identity which is located in between the two. However, Bhabha also points out that the ambivalence represented in the colonial hybrid must not be taken to be the answer to a dispute between two different cultures. It is rather an issue of colonial representation where the hybrid is no longer recognizable to the colonialist authority as an uncivilized subject. Instead, it has become a representation of a complex and ambivalent cultural identity.[18] This clearly seems relevant in order to analyse Kip's relationship to India as his home country and England as a colonial power.

In addition to the colonial presence, there is also a global atmosphere in *The English Patient*. This may seem to be especially evident in the use of gardens throughout the story. In relation to this, Michel Foucault's reflections on the symbolism of gardens have helped me come to grasp with the global perspective in the novel. 'The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to bring together inside its rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world, with a space still more sacred than the others that were like an umbilicus, the navel of the world at its center', Foucault notes in 'Of Other Spaces'.[19] The world comes together inside the boundaries of a garden. Its centre symbolizes the life-giving space of a navel, the source of life, the water-fountain. As gardens appear frequently in the novel in question, the idea of the garden as a microcosm of the world may explain the function of both the organic and the painted gardens in the novel.

While the thesis is informed by the various theoretical insights noted above, it is predominantly an attempt at a close reading of certain aspects of *The English Patient*. The quotations and passages are explained and analysed with the purpose of investigating the

[17] Bhabha, p. 159.
[18] Bhabha, pp. 159-63.
[19] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', in *Visual Culture: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies,* eds. Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith, *Spaces of Visual Culture Volume III* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 93-101 (p. 98).

characters' sense of belonging. The aim of this methodology is to give a detailed, in-depth analysis of belonging in the novel. The thesis is divided into three chapters with this preceding introduction and a conclusion. In chapter 1 I look at the characters' sense of belonging on a local level with special attention to the villa as a new home. I have also included in this chapter an investigation on how Kip's tent alienates some of the characters and how it visualizes the presence of the 'Other' in the novel. Furthermore, Caravaggio's obsession with the identity of the patient deserves some attention as it seems to be of importance when analysing his sense of belonging to the others. Chapter 2 is concentrated on the global dimensions of the story. This chapter is perhaps the one with most theoretical weight with regard to world literature and post-colonial theories. Here, I analyse the glocal narrative in the novel and the colonial hybridity of Kip. A discussion on the nationless condition of the patient and Almásy's sense of belonging is also included in this chapter. In chapter 3 I look at how the belonging formed in the villa fails to uphold relations after the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In this investigation I analyse how the characters react to the bombings, how there is a conflict of cultures, and how their sense of belonging is reduced to a memory for Kip and Hana at the end of the novel.

1 A Sense of Belonging

Belonging is a central theme in *The English Patient*. The theme is problematized in the novel where the characters are presented as having undergone traumatic events during a terrible world war. This has left them all confused, in various degrees, as to their own sense of belonging and identity. The traumatic events have, both physically and psychologically, left scars which need healing. Hence, I would argue that the characters' various ways of dealing with their sense of belonging is a part of the healing process they have to undergo in order to continue with their lives after the war. As the story develops, the theme changes its focus. In the beginning, the characters do not have a stable sense of belonging other than their national identity, for some not even that. The English patient, for instance, does not acknowledge any nationality. The characters' national identity is a product of their past, it is an idea they bring with them to the villa where they perceive themselves as part of an imagined community, or nation. Each character has his or her own imagined community and loyalties to respect. As the story progresses, however, the characters form a belonging to each other where they interact socially. Accordingly, they form a community for themselves in which nationality is not an issue, or at least secondary to their other identities.

When the characters form a new community in the sense of a social inter-dependency based on their belonging, they do so on a local level within the restricted area of the villa. In order to do this, they need to transcend their original sense of belonging, that is to override the limits of belonging and thus also their national, or cultural, identity. Only by having a sense of belonging to each other will the characters be able to relate to each other socially and consequently create a true community. Cultural identity, which is a part of one's sense of belonging, is not a fixed entity incapable of change. Rather, according to Stuart Hall, it 'is a matter of "becoming" as well as of "being". It belongs to the future as much as to the past.'[20] Thus, the characters may experience that their cultural identity undergoes change as they are continuously tied together in social interaction with each other. Since the characters' sense of belonging and identity is in this case already confused, they develop a new sense of belonging which transcends their confused one. This also helps heal their scars by creating unity. The unity, then, is strengthened as they come to learn to respect each other's traditions and

[20] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, a Reader,* ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1996), pp. 110-21 (p. 112).

differences. In this chapter I will investigate how this new sense of belonging is created and how the characters establish their community on a local level. To do this, I will analyse their relations to each other in the villa and look at how they transcend the limits of their belonging to their imagined communities.

The Villa: a New Home?

The Villa San Girolamo is a ruin, damaged and scarred by continuous bombings during the war: 'The Villa San Girolamo, built to protect inhabitants from the flesh of the devil, had the look of a besieged fortress, the limbs of most of the statues blown off during the first days of shelling. There seemed little demarcation between house and landscape, between damaged building and the burned and shelled remnants of the earth.'[21] Originally a nunnery, the villa was occupied by the Germans and made into an army base, housing several hundreds of soldiers, before the Allies reclaimed it and made use of it as a war hospital. Due to it being actively used by the opposing sides in the war, the building has suffered great damages, reducing it to something indiscernible where one cannot tell where the building starts and nature takes over. It is a wounded building supposed to keep evil out, both in its history as a nunnery and as a hospital. However, the image 'of a besieged fortress' gives the impression of a building under pressure of some force of evil which it cannot keep out much longer. This is the setting where the four characters meet and live together, and I would argue that the villa's change in purpose, in addition to it being a ruin and scarred by war, also reflects or symbolizes the characters' confused and damaged identities. Just like the building, the characters are under siege from the influence of the world and the effects of the war. According to Nicholas B. Dirks in his essay 'In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory at the End of the Century', in which he discusses the symbolism of the ruins in *The English Patient* in regard to cultural theory, 'The ruin was a sign of loss, of absence. Crumbling rock and fragments of shard stood for wholes that could never again be achieved, if even conceived.'[22] In similar ways, the characters' identities are also in ruins and their sense of belonging is broken. That

[21] Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), p. 45. Further references are to this edition of the novel, and will be given in parentheses in the main text.
[22] Nicholas B. Dirks, 'In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory at the End of the Century', in *In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory at the End of the Century,* ed. Nicholas B. Dirks (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 1-18 (p. 8).

is, they have scarred and confused identities which in turn create a complicated sense of belonging.

In the case of Hana, who is the person who brings the other characters together, we are told that she has suffered not so much physical wounds as psychological ones. Not only has she lost her father to the war, but also an unborn baby in an abortion. This happened while she was caring for wounded soldiers whom she never knew with certainty would survive the next hour or not. The psychological stress which she has suffered has thus left her confused as to her purpose in the world. With her father dead, her dead baby's father lost in the war and nothing left in her home country but her stepmother Clara, Hana turns to the English patient, seeking some kind of meaning in her life. The relationship she develops with the patient gives her a new sense of belonging which seems to transcend her original wounded one. For instance, she describes him as 'her despairing saint' (p. 3). He becomes her saviour in that he is dependent on her, not to survive, but to be comfortable in his last moments. Furthermore, as he is dependent on her, she is likewise dependent on the fact that he, or the process they go through together, will help heal her wounds. She needs her saint in order to have meaning in her life, and may be said to project her feelings of loss on to the patient and to make him into a father figure. Hana was not there when her father died, and consequently could not take care of him.[23] As compensation for her absence, she now takes care of the English patient instead: 'It was sometime after this [the death of her father] that she had come across the English patient – someone who looked like a burned animal, taut and dark, a pool for her' (p. 44). The patient enters Hana's life as though he were 'a burned animal' in need of her skills and attention. He becomes a 'pool for her', a place where she may plunge her sorrow and pain in order to compensate for her father. Still, though Hana's attachment to the patient may be seen as a father-daughter relationship, it also borders on a Platonic love relationship.[24] She attaches herself to him in every way and refuses to leave him and that even after the Allies ruined the water supply to the villa, thinking it would make her leave.

Although Hana has attached herself to the patient, her identity and sense of belonging are still wounded and at a loss. She tries to make the villa her home, with her own rules. She plays a game of Paradise all by herself; she explores the library, finding books to read both to herself and to the patient. She even fixes a broken staircase by placing books where the stairs

[23] Rufus Cook, '"Imploding Time and Geography": Narrative Compressions in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 33rd ser., 109 (1998), 109-125 (p. 117).
[24] Malin Furuholm, 'The Idea of Global Community in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*', unpublished term paper (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2011), p. 9.

should have been. Nevertheless, while there are several beds available for her to sleep in, 'She herself preferred to be nomadic in the house with her pallet or hammock, sleeping sometimes in the English patient's room, sometimes in the hall, depending on temperature or wind or light' (p. 14). Hana's behaviour bears witness of a self-imposed restlessness where she cannot find a place for herself in the villa. She even describes herself as 'living like a vagrant, while elsewhere the English patient reposed in his bed like a king' (p. 15). The patient has his place where his needs are taken care of, while Hana still searches for her own belonging, for a place where she can find rest and healing. Even though Hana has found a place to live in the villa, and a meaning to go with it through caring for the patient, she still misses something. This keeps her nomadic within the house, unable to override her original sense of belonging. Though taking care of the patient is part of her healing process, Hana needs someone with whom she can relate to apart from the nurse-patient relationship, or the imagined father-daughter relationship, in order to complete her new sense of belonging.

A more fulfilling sense of belonging, albeit a temporary one, can be found in Hana's relationship with Kip, the sapper. After defusing a difficult bomb together, they fall in love and initiate a relationship with each other. Kip, in contrast to the patient and Caravaggio, does not need the medical care Hana can offer, but together they may offer each other consolation and teach each other to become human again. First, Hana finds her place in the villa, in Kip's tent. Here they do not only have a sexual relationship, they also keep each other company in a self-imposed celibacy for a period of time. They do so not because they cannot make love, but because they need the physical presence of another being next to them as they discover 'The love of the idea of him or her' (p. 237). The emotional bonds which they share are not conditioned by a physical relationship. Rather, they are strengthened by the thought, the idea, of each other. Second, Hana has taught Kip 'to make a noise, desired it of him' (p. 134) in their most intimate moments. As Kip is a soldier, making a noise could be a matter of life and death. However: 'if he is relaxed at all since the fighting it is only in this [in their intimate moments], as if finally willing to admit his whereabouts in the darkness, to signal out his pleasure with a human sound' (p. 134). Hana has willed him back to being human after the traumatic events of the war by teaching him to utter one of the most basic human sounds while making love.

Like Hana, Kip has also experienced a loss of belonging which has left him with a confused identity. When he enlisted in the British Army, he knowingly broke with a family tradition where the eldest brother was to enlist, the next brother was to become a doctor and

the next a merchant. Then again, Kip's elder brother was engaged in the Indian opposition to British rule and consequently refused to acknowledge British authority. The tradition was already broken. Still, it is possible, even at this point, to discern a conflict of identity in Kip as he identifies himself both with British culture and his Indian one. His sense of belonging has changed to include Britain. Furthermore, this belonging is strengthened when he is stationed in England under the tutelage of Lord Suffolk in order to be educated as a sapper. Despite his awareness of his racial otherness, and while he reflects on the fact that he would have been treated the same as any other English person had it not been for his dark skin, he still falls in love with the English. He is fascinated by the English manner of doing things, such as the intonation of the language; when reading a barometer on the wall 'He muttered the words to himself with his new English pronunciation' (p. 199). Kip changes his Indian pronunciation and replaces it with a 'new English' one. I would argue that the power relation between English and Kip's language has shifted where he puts on an English accent and therefore also an English identity, consequently suppressing his Indian background.

Much of the reason for Kip's fascination with and good impression of England and English gentlemen relates to his relation to Lord Suffolk and his team. Lord Suffolk is an eccentric person who educates sappers for the British Army, and he welcomed Kip as an equal: 'He [Kip] stepped into a family, after a year abroad, as if he were the prodigal returned, offered a chair at the table, embraced with conversations' (p. 201). Since Kip left his family in India against his family's wishes, he became an outcast siding with the colonial power. In England, though, he is welcomed into the home of Lord Suffolk as if he were a lost son who has finally come home again. While there are no blood relations, one might say that the family community Kip has been welcomed into reminds one of the concept *Gemeinschaft* as explained by Ferdinand Tönnies, a community, or family, into which one is born.[25] The family Kip left in India, then, may be seen as a true *Gemeinschaft*, while the new family in England may be seen as a replacement for his belonging to his Indian family. Kip, in other words, has found himself a new family and adapted to English culture in such a way that his sense of belonging is more attached to England than India. In the case of Kip's imagined community, it has, as a partial result of this, come to consist of a collective British consciousness which includes India as colony. However, Kip's sense of belonging to this community becomes wounded when Lord Suffolk and most of his team are killed while

[25] Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Civil Society*, ed. Jose Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 18.

dismantling a new type of bomb. Suddenly, only Kip and a fellow sapper are left of the original team, making Kip the most experienced of them. Because Kip cannot handle the responsibility of being in charge, or being the person with authority, he disappears into the army and eventually ends up in the villa. Here, he finds a different family, one in need of reconciliation and healing.

Kip's sense of belonging thus starts to heal in the company of other wounded identities. His relationship with Hana is playful and without conditions, and he finds a new patron and source of knowledge in the English patient. In my opinion, Kip has not shed his English identity, or his sense of belonging to the British, since he seeks advice and wisdom from someone he believes to be superior to himself in terms of knowledge, namely the patient: 'In recent days, Hana had watched him [Kip] sitting beside the English patient, and it seemed to her a reversal of *Kim*. The young student was now Indian, the wise old teacher was English' (p. 117). The impression that the patient is English is important for Kip's healing process as he needs someone who can replace Lord Suffolk as his mentor. Consequently, the patient also verifies his belief that the English are superior. As he thinks the patient is English, he still has a link to his English belonging. Therefore, Kip creates a new sense of belonging which not only includes his English identity, but also the person who allows this identity to persist. As a result, Kip's previous sense of belonging is both maintained as he imagines the patient to be a part of his original British community, and at the same time transcended and made into a new one.

The national identity of the patient is, to begin with, a mystery. He himself says that he is English, but there are no papers or documents that can verify his story, only his English accent and his knowledge of Britain. Furthermore, due to loss of memory, either self-imposed or actual amnesia, the patient cannot remember his name, which further complicates the process of identification. The fact that his whole body has been burnt beyond recognition makes it impossible to identify him by appearances. Like the villa, his body is a ruin signalling a loss which can never be healed. It is a loss of self where his only point of reference is a copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus which he has kept with him at all times. The book comes to represent his identity as he has continuously modified it by gluing in scraps of newspapers and other bits of information he has found relevant during his explorations. Thus, he has projected his sense of self and his view of the world into the book, making it his hold on reality.

The patient's sense of belonging, though, is not tied to a nation, but rather to the desert where he lived as an explorer and cartographer, mapping unknown lands. However, this sense of belonging can hardly be called material. He is not attached to a particular place in the desert. Where his travel companions put their names on places they discovered, the patient 'wanted to erase [his] name and the place [he] had come from' (p. 148), to become as anonymous as the desert itself. He does not want to leave his name on places he has discovered. Instead, he wants to 'erase' his own national identity. The desert, then, became a place for the patient where he could easily 'slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, any nation' (p. 148). He has become nationless in the desert and has been able to travel without belonging to 'any nation'. Although the patient had come to see the meaninglessness of nations and nationhood even before the war started, the turning point for his wish to be nationless seems to have been, as I see it, the arrival of the Second World War. When the war invaded the desert it became crucial to belong to the right nation, to be on the right side, depending on what army one would encounter. His experience of the desert has left him with the knowledge that the desert is a place that has existed long before any of the nations at war. According to Benedict Anderson, a nation 'is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.'[26] A nation, in other words, is imagined by the people who constitute it, thus making others, or other nations, recognize the imagined community as a nation-state that is sovereign within its limited area. Still, the patient refuses to imagine himself as part of a community, or a nation, because he does not see the value of it in the same way as he values the desert. Where the desert accepts a person for whom he or she is, regardless of nationality, a nation restricts this person to a certain area. As a result, the nation also places this person in a national context where others may recognize and judge the individual based on the actions of a nation-state.

The fact that the patient refuses any nationality makes it easy for the other residents in the villa to imagine him to be English. In this regard, he also projects Englishness in the form of his knowledge of Britain and his fluent language. Furthermore, the patient's extensive knowledge makes him a reference point and a source of information for the others. Thus, the patient's function in the villa is to represent culture and humanism. He reminds the others of the damage done in the war and at the same time teaches them how to overcome it by not putting too much weight on the importance of nationality. Being burnt beyond recognition,

[26] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 5.

the patient is a living symbol of the devastations of war. The others are reminded of this every time they see him: 'The Englishman's dark lean face with its angular nose has the appearance of a still hawk swaddled in sheets. The coffin of a hawk, Caravaggio thinks' (p. 123). The image of 'a still hawk swaddled in sheets' gives the impression of a fierce animal that has been deprived of his life and now has to die wrapped in sheets that will also be his coffin, his death. Even though the patient is a victim of war, he does not blame a single nation for his situation. He rather blames the idea of nation. Accordingly, he advocates a nationless state through his stories from the desert where nationality is insignificant to the inhabitants of the desert: 'There were rivers of desert tribes, the most beautiful humans I've met in my life. We were German, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states' (p. 147). The patient's argument is that in the encounter with the desert tribes, nationality became irrelevant. He began 'to hate nations' because, in his opinion, nation-states undo mankind by declaring war on each other. The patient explains that his best friend, Madox, 'died because of nations' (p. 147) when he killed himself in his local church in England. The reason was that all his friends had turned out to be enemies; that is, of opposing nations in the war. Still, there is one person who does not accept the patient's lack of national identity as easily as the others. Caravaggio comes to the villa with the purpose of finding Hana. Being a friend of her father, and sharing the same past, he sees it as his duty to look after her since she is a part of his imagined community, or original sense of belonging. Therefore, when he becomes aware of her unconditioned affection for the patient, he wishes to expose him as the liar he thinks the patient is and to protect her from him.

When Caravaggio arrives at the villa, he is, like the patient, in ruins. He raids Hana's medical supplies in search of morphine in order to relieve himself of the pain he is suffering. Before the war, Caravaggio made a living as a thief. His skills at burglary were taken advantage of by the military in order to make use of him as a spy. However, he was caught by the enemy who cut off both his thumbs. Consequently, he has lost his ability to use his skills as aptly as before: '[Hana] is looking at Caravaggio, knowing his skills from the past, not quite saying it. "I lost my nerve," he says' (pp. 35-36). By losing his thumbs, he has also lost a part of his identity as a thief, since he can no longer be of use in his old trade. Thus, he needs the morphine to alleviate both his physical pain as much as his mental pain for becoming a cripple. Barbara H. Reitan compares Caravaggio's mutilation with his namesake, the baroque artist Caravaggio. The artist Caravaggio had been punished due to scandalous

behaviour and provocative paintings, and his punishment was to lose his thumbs. Without thumbs, he could not produce new works of art. Similarly, the thief Caravaggio cannot perform according to his abilities as thief.[27] His need, then, to reveal the patient's identity is important to his healing process: he needs to make use of himself in some way. For this reason, he employs his interrogation skills and investigates the patient's past. In addition, because he sees it as his duty to look after Hana, he also has a need for her to see the patient not as her saint, but as a person with flaws. As a result, Hana may transfer her affection for the patient on to Caravaggio instead. Hence, in my opinion, Caravaggio's sense of belonging is acutely tied to Hana's presence: wherever she is, he will follow.

When the characters come together at the villa and start interacting socially, they create a community for themselves where they depend on each other for healing and reconciliation. They all undergo a healing process where they become attached to each other through their different relations, consequently creating a sense of belonging to their own little community. As part of the attempt at creating normality in their community, the characters play games with each other, they read books and play music, and celebrate Hana's birthday. That is to say, they actively work at creating some form of culture for themselves. In my opinion, this culture is a broken one, given that the games they play are not always positive; most of the books in the library are ruined by the weather, and music may have fatal consequences. To put it differently, the culture is ambiguous in that it is both beautiful, but also dangerous for the inhabitants. For instance, when Kip and Hana play hide and seek, Kip accidentally mistakes Caravaggio for Hana and grips his neck in order to detain him. Kip and Hana find this amusing, but for Caravaggio the incident brings back memories from when he was interrogated and lost his thumbs: 'Caravaggio began to shake within the boy's grip, sweat already all over him, unable to struggle out. The glare of light from both lamps now on him. He somehow had to climb and crawl out of this terror. *Confess*. The girl was laughing. He needed to calm his voice before he spoke, but they were hardly listening, excited at their adventure' (p. 236). Kip and Hana are no longer familiar to him; they become strangers, a boy and a girl tormenting him. The reality of the situation for Caravaggio is further emphasized by the mere fact that it was a female nurse who cut off his thumbs when he was interrogated. Thus, he is traumatized by Kip and Hana's innocent game while the two lovers are ignorant of it. Furthermore, as there are holes in the roof and walls of the library after the bombings, the

[27] Barbara H. Reitan, 'A Postmodern Picture: Imagery, Intertextuality and Identity in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*', MA thesis (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2005), p. 75.

books are subject to the harsh conditions of the weather, thus ruining them. In addition, though music is considered pleasant, it was not the pleasantness of music that attracted Kip when he first entered the villa and found Hana playing the piano. It was the danger of a mine in the instrument that was his main focus at that time. Even musical instruments become a danger to the inhabitants. Still, they also enjoy music when Caravaggio finds a gramophone and they all come together for a small party in the patient's room. The culture in their community, then, is ambiguous in the sense that it both represents the danger that has been and which is still present on some occasions, and the social values which bring the characters together. It is real and shapes their relations, but it also gives a hint of danger and ruin.

The idea of culture in the community as being ambiguous is also transferrable to the villa itself as a ruin. Dirks argues that 'The ruin not only housed culture, it stood for it: like culture itself, the ruin was at once material and ethereal, simultaneously about history and memory, a sign of achievement and a signal of failure, an inspiration for life as well as an intimation of death.'[28] In short, the ruin can be seen to represent culture both through its presence and its history. Its presence as a ruin signals the failure of civilization to take care of its culture, while the ruin's history inspires the spectators to imagine the life that created it in the first place, hence also creating memories. In this respect, the characters' pasts can be seen as reflections of the ruin as they all have a ruined history before they came to the villa. When they retell their stories, they also recall memories of their pasts that are either hurtful or of longing. However, this also creates new memories as Hana writes about the other characters in books at the library, some chosen at random, and others with a specific purpose. For instance, she writes about Kip and the patient in the novel *Kim*, describing their relationship, while she associates Caravaggio with *The Last of the Mohicans*. By writing stories about the others in the ruin, she creates memories that merge with the ruin and become part of it as she puts the books back into the broken shelves for others to read. That is to say, the ruin is a place of culture, of history and memories, where the characters may be inspired to build new lives and create their own culture. Moreover, as the ruin both inspires life and hints at death, it reflects well, in my opinion, the situation of the characters: they create relations to each other through culture and thus also life, while at the same time constantly being in danger of mines. In addition, they are surrounded by death in the form of ruins and the broken body of the patient.

[28] Dirks, p. 8.

While the ruin represents what has been, the culture in the characters' shared community becomes a possibility of what may be. According to Anderson, 'Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.'[29] The community imagined by the characters, then, is imagined in a setting broken by war where they attempt to return to normalcy and create a new home. They do so in the style of a family where Kip and Hana are the two lovers; Caravaggio imagines himself a father figure for Hana; while the patient is the superior head of family, the knowledgeable one. Consequently, they have stretched and transcended the limits of their original imagined communities and created a new sense of belonging to each other in the form of a family through their relations and social interaction. As mentioned in the introduction, this notion of family in the villa may also be comparable with *Gemeinschaft*, much the same as Kip's former 'family' in England. Though there are no blood relations, they still imagine themselves to be in the likeness of a family. This sense of belonging as a family for a while gives the impression that though the setting is precarious, the characters have been able to create a stable community for themselves that will survive the aftermath of the war.

Kip's Tent

Although the characters manage to imagine a community in the ruin, Kip's tent seems to disturb their sense of belonging to each other. When Kip arrives at the villa he does not stay in the house, instead he pitches a tent outside on the premises. This sets him apart from the others. He does not share the same roof, or the same home: 'At first he will not come into the house at all. He walks past on some duty or other to do with the dismantling of mines. Always courteous. A little nod of his head' (p. 76). Kip keeps his distance to begin with due to his experiences in the army as 'being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world. He had built up defences of character against all that, trusting only those who befriended him' (p. 209). He trusts only himself and isolates himself from the others by keeping to his tent. Furthermore, even though he becomes more comfortable in the villa as he gets to know the other characters, he never really uses it as his home: 'He seems casually content with this small group in the villa, some kind of loose star on the edge of their system. This is like a holiday for him after the war of mud and rivers and bridges. He enters the house

[29] Anderson, p. 6.

only when invited in, just a tentative visitor […]' (p. 79). To put it differently, the villa does not represent a home for Kip the way it does for Hana. Rather, it becomes like a sanctuary, a place free from the atrocities of war where he can relax and recuperate from his wounds. As I see it, Kip becomes an observer of the other characters; he stays on the outside looking in. Though he participates and interacts socially with the others, he still manages to stay apart as he can retreat to his tent at any time he wishes. His role as observer can also be related to his habit of looking at statues and paintings through his rifle sights throughout the war: 'He swung the sights up to her face and studied her again. A different look in the fading light around her. A face which in the darkness looked more like someone he knew. A sister. Someday a daughter. If he could have parted with it, the sapper would have left something there as his gesture. But he had his own faith after all' (p. 85). In this case, Kip has come upon a statue of the Virgin Mary in a festival. He is standing on the outside looking in, observing the rituals of the locals in Gabicce Mare. Kip feels related to the statue, as if she were someone he knew, or someone he would know in the future. Nevertheless, though he feels attached to this statue from another culture than his own, he still reminds himself that he has his own religion, and traditions, to respect. Thus, he does not give himself over to another culture, even though he feels attached to it. Furthermore, the use of rifle sights gives the impression that Kip is not only observing, but also studying Western culture. As it is quite different from his own culture, he is fascinated by it and seeks to know more by looking through his sights. What he finds is both mysterious to him and a demystification of the other culture. When Kip first sees the Virgin Mary, he is looking for the enemy across the river: 'He had the shadow in his sights when the halo was suddenly illuminated around the head of the Virgin Mary. She was coming out of the sea' (pp. 83-4). The appearance of the Virgin coming out of the sea, as though she were a revelation from God, gives a magical feel to the scene which takes Kip by surprise. The Virgin's mysterious appearance is, however, quickly subdued when he discovers that she is being transported on a boat by two men. Still, it is representative for how Kip perceives Western culture as different from his own, and for his need to study it and hence demystify it. He can do this through his rifle sights and still be at a distance. The sights, in other words, give Kip the entrance he needs to Western culture without actually taking part in it. In addition, the distance which is represented in the sights separates Kip from his object of study, hence giving the image of two different worlds on each side of the sights. This may not be all positive. Elizabeth Kella argues that the rifle sights

also give the impression of Western culture as the enemy.[30] When Kip looks through the sights, he also points the rifle in the same direction. Therefore, it would seem he takes an aim at the object of observation, perhaps as a precaution against any hostile action. The villa, though, becomes, like the Virgin Mary, a place Kip respects and feels attached to due to his relations with the other characters, but he still reminds himself that he has his own interests to take care of.

Although Hana finds some sense of belonging in her relationship with Kip, his tent also slightly disturbs her feeling of belonging to him:

> It is his world. She feels displaced out of Canada during these nights. He asks her why she cannot sleep. She lies there irritated at his self-sufficiency, his ability to turn so easily away from the world. She wants a tin roof for the rain, two poplar trees to shiver outside her window, a noise she can sleep against, sleeping trees and sleeping roofs that she grew up with in the east end of Toronto and then for a couple of years with Patrick and Clara along the Skootamatta River and later Georgian Bay. She has not found a sleeping tree, even in the density of this garden. (pp. 135-36)

Though they both have come to share it, as they sleep together more often than not, Hana feels that the tent is Kip's domain, 'his world'. She is reminded of her own world and 'feels displaced out of Canada' as she becomes alienated in the tent. Kip does not understand her feelings or her restlessness, something which irritates Hana. She cannot understand how he can 'turn so easily away from the world' and be content with being where he is. His self-sufficiency and detachment from his surroundings remind her of her home in Canada where she was surrounded by familiar sights and sounds to comfort her in her restlessness. This restlessness she suffers is contrasted with the sleepiness of her memories: 'a noise she can *sleep* against, *sleeping* trees and *sleeping* roofs' (my emphasis) (p. 135). Moreover, she 'has not found a sleeping tree' on the premises of the villa, henceforth signalling that she still has not found her place, her sense of belonging, in the villa. Like her vagrancy and nomadic behaviour in the villa, Kip's tent problematizes her sense of belonging as she is reminded of her present situation and therefore feels out of place. Kip's self-sufficiency and ability to turn away from the world further frustrates her as he is not dependent on anyone. This autonomy from the other characters is also provocative in that he does not integrate into their community to the same degree as the others. Where Hana, Caravaggio and the patient are dependent on each other, Kip manages quite well on his own: 'The rest of us are just

[30] Elizabeth Kella, 'Beloved Communitites: Solidarity and Difference in Fiction by Michael Ondaatje, Toni Morrison, and Joy Kogawa,' *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia*, 110 (2000), p. 104.

periphery, she thinks, his eyes are only on what is dangerous, his listening ear on whatever is happening in Helsinki or Berlin that comes over the short-wave' (p. 133). Hana's view of Kip is that he does not attach himself to his immediate surroundings, but rather singles out whatever he thinks is dangerous while at the same time concentrating on on-going events outside their location. However, what, or whose, world Kip turns away from is uncertain. As it is Hana who describes her frustration in this respect, it would be plausible to say that it is *her* world he turns away from, *her* world which makes her restless and unable to sleep. Even so, seen from Kip's perspective, it is rather his own personal troubles which make him isolate himself: 'Later, when there was a whole personal history of events and moments in his mind, he would need something equivalent to white sound to burn or bury everything while he thought of the problems in front of him. The radio or crystal set and its loud band music would come later, a tarpaulin to hold the rain of real life away from him' (p. 206). Kip's loss of friends in the war, in addition to his own experiences as a sapper, distracts him in his work and everyday life. To block out 'the rain of real life', then, and to survive the trauma of war, he uses the radio as a different distraction. By doing this, he also blocks out aspects of the social life around him such as his relations with the others in the villa. Hana is not aware of this and consequently finds his withdrawal frustrating and provocative as she cannot stabilize their belonging to each other.

When Kip stands apart from the other inhabitants by keeping to his tent, he also invites them to imagine him as an 'Other'. Hana, Caravaggio and the English patient are the people who reside inside the villa, a place inside walls, while Kip is the 'Other' who keeps to himself outside this place inside the walls. Even though one could say that Kip is not entirely alone in his tent since he shares it with Hana, and hence there is a connection between the people inside the villa and the 'Other', there is still a mental barrier that hinders them from sharing their inner emotions: 'There were such shadows of memory with him when he lay in his tent with Hana in the small hill town in Italy. Revealing his past or qualities of his character would have been too loud a gesture. Just as he could never turn and inquire of her what deepest motive caused this relationship' (pp. 209-10). Their pasts simultaneously unite them by being haunted by the war, and separate them by being too personal for them to share. In addition, though they share the same tent, and therefore the same space, they also develop a distance between themselves: 'As they grow intimate the space between them during the day grows larger. She likes the distance he leaves her, the space he assumes is their right' (p. 134). The relationship between Kip and Hana is one of consolation and love, but not of obligation or

commitment: ‘Later she will realize that he never allowed himself to be beholden to her, or her to him’ (p. 135), and ‘She did not believe she could turn fully to him and be his lover’ (p. 289). Such reflections on Hana’s part contribute to the image of Kip as one on the outside, and thus as an ‘Other’. Furthermore, as the three characters that live inside the villa are all from the West, or the Occident, it would be plausible to say that they also see Kip as their contrasting image. Caravaggio, for instance, does not like the idea of the sapper making dinner: ‘Caravaggio was not looking forward to it. One meal in three was a loss as far as he was concerned. Kip found vegetables and presented them barely cooked, just briefly boiled into a soup’ (p. 282). Because Kip is a vegetarian, and even prepares the vegetables in a manner that is different from what the others are used to, Caravaggio helps himself to some meat before he goes to dinner so that he can supply whatever the sapper has neglected to provide. The cultural contrast that presents itself in such everyday tasks and routines further emphasises the differences between Kip and the other residents. Moreover, Hana has her own opinion of Kip: ‘She imagines all of Asia through the gestures of this one man. The way he lazily moves, his quiet civilization. He speaks of warrior saints and she now feels he is one, stern and visionary, pausing only in these rare times of sunlight to be godless, informal, his head back again on the table so the sun can dry his spread hair like grain in a fan-shaped straw basket’ (p. 229). Kip becomes a representation of the Orient to Hana, who imagines him as a mysterious, god-like persona. She sees him as a warrior saint, ‘stern and visionary’ in his appearance, drawing a parallel between real life and her fantasy about the Orient. Kip’s slow motions and ‘quiet civilization’ are contrasted with her Western identity. Where her experiences of the West are of war and terror, her experiences of Kip, and thus also the Orient, are of tranquillity and a civilization that has no need to make itself superior to others.

Caravaggio’s Obsession

The stability of the community is further troubled by Caravaggio’s obsession with the national identity of the patient. As Caravaggio knows Hana from Canada, she is a reminder of the joyful times he spent there with her family. Consequently, he relates to her as being the last connection to what was. Still, his attachment to Hana is uncertain: ‘War has unbalanced him and he can return to no other world as he is, wearing these false limbs that morphine promises. He is a man in middle age who has never become accustomed to families. All his

life he has avoided permanent intimacy' (p. 123). Though Hana is his last connection to his past, war has damaged him in such a way that he cannot return to that world the way he is, with 'these false limbs that morphine promises'. He has never become attached to family life and has, consequently, lived like a bachelor with no sense of belonging. As a result, his attachment to Hana is unclear to begin with, since the reader may not be sure what role he is to play in her life at the villa. Once Kip enters the scene, however, Caravaggio gradually takes on an avuncular part in the little community. When his role is settled, Caravaggio changes his sense of belonging by becoming protective towards Hana. The fact that she is a part of his original imagined community makes her his responsibility. Her attachment to the patient thus becomes a threat to his role as protector, as he thinks the patient is misleading Hana intentionally in order to be taken care of.

Caravaggio's obsession with finding out the truth about the patient is as much a result of his own vulnerable position as it is about protecting Hana, however. His sense of helplessness, in addition to his traumatic experiences in the enemy's interrogation room, leaves him with a need to distinguish friend from foe. In this respect, national identity becomes a key issue: 'He needs to know who this Englishman from the desert is, and reveal him for Hana's sake. Or perhaps invent a skin for him, the way tannic acid camouflages a burned man's rawness' (p. 124). Caravaggio's desperation brings him to a point where he sees it as necessary to 'invent a skin' for the patient in order to lift the imagined disillusionment from Hana's eyes. In this sense he is willing to make up a personage for the patient, a false identity, to serve his purpose in discrediting him. Then again, Caravaggio further reflects that inventing a new skin for the patient would do no good in the villa: 'But here they were shedding skins. They could imitate nothing but what they were. There was no defence but to look for the truth in others' (p. 124). Caravaggio's vulnerability is quite evident in this situation as he is used to make up new identities and imitate other personalities in his profession as thief and spy for the Allies. In the villa, this is no longer necessary. Here they are shedding their previous identities, real or imitated, leaving them with nothing but who they are as vulnerable human beings. His only defence against shedding his own skin, and thus revealing himself in his own vulnerability, is 'to look for the truth in others'. To protect his vulnerability, then, he becomes obsessed with revealing the truth about the patient.

Caravaggio's continued interrogations of the patient create uncertainty in the group. He is being inquisitive about the past and wants the others to see that there is more to the patient than what meets the eye. This uncertainty further disturbs the sense of belonging in the

group as it would seem that the past matters more than their present situation where they are trying to recuperate from past damages and make a new future for themselves. Still, when Caravaggio in the end does find out the truth about the patient, this uncertainty disappears. He has served his purpose as interrogator and discovered that it really did not matter who the patient was in order to have peace: ‘The last person I expected to find here in this shelled nunnery was Count Ladislaus de Almásy. Quite honestly, I’ve become more fond of you than most of the people I worked with’ (p. 268). Through his conversations with the patient, Caravaggio has come to know a person instead of an object of interrogation. He has come to like this person and realizes that friends can be made despite different national identity in a time of war. As a result, in my opinion, Caravaggio has grown from being insecure and vulnerable to becoming content with his situation in the villa and he consequently helps stabilize the sense of belonging in this community. Furthermore, as Caravaggio’s obsession was tied to the national identity of the patient, this identity ceased to be of importance as the patient had already shed his skin both literally and figuratively in the fire. Accordingly, he could be nothing but what he was, or had become, when he arrived at the villa: nationless. Caravaggio’s acceptance of this removes the importance of national identity in his sense of belonging to the others, hence making it possible to look to the future instead of the past.

2 A Global Belonging

In the previous chapter I looked at how the characters of the novel came to relate to each other, and how a new sense of belonging was gradually created. The new belonging, in other words, formed the basis of a community on a local level in the ruined villa in the Italian countryside. This chapter will investigate how the local community can be seen in regard to a global perspective where the characters' sense of belonging not only functions to establish relationships between persons, but also between nations. To do this, it seems necessary initially to briefly consider the meaning of globalization. As there is an extensive literature on the uses of this term, I found it appropriate here to focus on globalization with regard to world literature theories. In this case, Peter Madsen's thoughts on globalization can be applied to the discussion of a global perspective. According to Madsen, globalization 'is a process that furthers the growth of common ideals, of "world thoughts" as guidelines in the mastering of an increasingly common global destiny.'[31] As noted earlier, the characters overcame their previous sense of belonging and formed a new community where they accepted each other for who they were, and not who they had been prior to the villa. Consequently, in relating to each other in such a way, the characters also promoted 'common ideals' in the sense that they needed to base their new community on values they might be said to share, such as love, friendship, healing and peace. From the ruins of war, the characters explore the opportunities and challenges of the idea of a global society within a microcosm. That is to say, the characters come to represent what would appear to be the foundations of 'an increasingly common global destiny'.

The globalized character of the local community is also, in my opinion, reflected through the number of nationalities which are represented in the villa. First, the nation of Italy is represented both through the location of the villa and through Caravaggio. Second, Canada is represented through both Hana and Caravaggio. Third, Kip represents both India and England as a colonial hybrid, and lastly, Almásy manages to represent both England and Hungary, while at the same time being nationless. In other words, the number of nationalities represented in the villa exceeds the number of persons.[32] In addition to this, all of the

[31] Peter Madsen, 'World Literature and World Thoughts: Brandes/Auerbach', in *Debating World Literature* ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 54-75 (p. 73).
[32] Malin Furuholm, 'The Idea of Global Community in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*', unpublished term paper (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2011), p. 4.

characters, with the exception of Hana, can be associated with at least two nationalities. Hence, the global perspective of the local community is further strengthened through the multiple representations of different nationalities. As the characters represent different nationalities, they all have loyalties towards their own imagined communities in their home countries. In order to investigate how they indirectly and directly create new relations between nations, it is necessary to look at the characters' sense of belonging to their respective nations, and how its limits have been tested and transcended in order to promote certain shared values in their local community.

A Glocal Narrative

By presenting a global perspective in the locality of the characters and their different nationalities, the locality becomes a place of global interaction connected by common values. Because the characters are all victims of the Second World War, they become a symbol of a broken world trying to piece itself together and find a common ground for all nations to share. This common ground is found in the values that connect both characters and nations alike. The global society which presents itself in the narration is an idea, or rather a fantasy, of a globalized world with representatives from both West and East living in harmony with one another. In this fantasy, nationality has become secondary to other values as nationality creates separateness while common values promote the creation of relations and cooperation. As noted in the introduction, the presentation of a local community as a reflection of a global community resembles a narrative strategy described by David Damrosch as a 'glocal' narrative. In this type of narrative, the writers may present topics from the world at large in a smaller context.[33] In short, the villa may be seen as a smaller context where world issues are played out among the characters. Since the novel is set in a post-war Europe, such issues would seem to be reflected in the characters' sense of belonging and their need for healing and reconciliation. A problem to be solved in their situation is whether they should remain true to their original belonging to their home country, or make a new one. As discussed in chapter 1, they form a new belonging to each other as a part of their healing process and as a reconciliation after the atrocities of the war. This problem of belonging can be seen in a

[33] David Damrosch, *How to Read World Literature* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 109.

greater context where nations had to form new belongings after the war in order to have reconciliation and peace.

The idea of a global community may be further emphasized if one were to take into consideration Michel Foucault's discussion of the symbolism of gardens. According to Foucault, the garden was a symbol in the East of the world coming together in one place: 'The garden is the smallest parcel of the world and then it is the totality of the world.'[34] Even if Foucault is referring to spaces in Persian mythology, the continued appearance of gardens in *The English Patient* may indicate that it has a function beyond that of mere decoration or cultivation. To put it differently, the garden is a space that is both local and global. It is cultivated by people in its locality, and shared by all cultures on a global scale. The use of the image of gardens is introduced as early as in the opening of the novel. This would seem to give the narration a global mood from the very start. The reader is presented with the setting of a garden where Hana has been working, then the reader is tracing Hana's path from her own gardens into the patient's room 'which is another garden – this one made up of trees and bowers painted over its walls and ceilings' (p. 3). When the reader follows Hana to the patient's room, he or she is also entering a new world. In this world the patient lies at the centre of a painted garden. The space the patient occupies in the garden is, according to Foucault, reserved for a water fountain. The fountain is supposed to be the centre of the world; it is the place the world comes together.[35] The image of the patient at the centre of a garden supports Foucault's explanation of the garden as a symbol of the world coming together as a sort of microcosm. The multiple nationalities represented in the patient in addition to his refusal of national identity, would make it seem that the world comes together in the patient. His occupying a central space in the garden also supports this image, and as both the patient and the garden are symbols of the world coming together in one place, an even greater stress is put upon this idea.

If one were to apply Foucault's reading of the symbolism of gardens, then the image of Hana tending her garden appears to be a reflection of her role as a nurse. As a nurse, she takes care of her garden just as she takes care of the patient. She needs the garden to plant food in order to live, and she needs the patient in order to have meaning in her life:

[34] Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', in *Visual Culture: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* eds. Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith, *Spaces of Visual Culture Volume III* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 93-101 (p. 98).
[35] Ibid.

> To Hana the wild gardens were like further rooms. She worked along the edges of them aware always of unexploded mines. In one soil-rich area beside the house she began to garden with a furious passion that could come only to someone who had grown up in a city. In spite of the burned earth, in spite of the lack of water. Someday there would be a bower of limes, rooms of green light. (p. 45)

The gardens are not a separate space to Hana. Instead, they are incorporated into the villa as 'further rooms'. Since she tries to make the villa her home, these outdoor rooms need to be explored and made her own. By cultivating a garden, she also lays down a lot of effort and expectations of getting results from her hard work. This seems to be of importance to her healing process where she wants to transform 'the burned earth' into 'rooms of green light'. She transforms the ruined garden into a garden of life and possibilities, despite the 'unexploded mines' and lack of nutrition. The dangers in the garden are no hindrance; they only need to be overcome in order to find the patch of 'soil-rich area' where it is safe to grow new life. Rachel D. Friedman notes that 'All of Hana's work to cultivate the earth and to produce food represents her attempt to create an edenic refuge for the villa's inhabitants, all displaced by the war. She domesticates the place and tries to root the "English" patient and the other "international bastards" there, creating a place for those who cannot be sure where else they belong.'[36] The gardening, then, may be a strategy to create a belonging in the villa. By making the villa appear as an Eden, the other characters may create ties of belonging to it. Nina C. Bache describes the borders between the villa and the garden as blurred, so that 'the garden penetrates the villa.'[37] This suggestion seems to be further strengthened by the appearance of the patient's room, which, as has been noted, is painted as an actual garden. The cultivation of the gardens may also affect Hana's sense of belonging. She attaches herself to the hope of new life for which she is responsible. As she is living like a vagrant in the villa, not being able to find her own space, the gardens may strengthen her belonging to the house by being a product of her own efforts. Yet, she is the only female presence in the villa and she misses Canada at times: 'I wanted to go home and there was no one at home. And I was sick of Europe. Sick of being treated like gold because I was female' (pp. 90-1). Her sense of belonging to Canada, though, is a strained one as she is filled with conflicting emotions concerning her home. Because her father is dead, and the only person left in Canada related to Hana is her stepmother, she feels lost when considering what to do. She does not want to return home as there is no one there except Clara, and she does not want to stay in Europe.

[36] Rachel D. Friedman, 'Deserts and Gardens: Herodotus and *The English Patient*', *Arion*, 3rd ser., 15: 3 (Winter 2008), 47-84 (pp. 72-3).
[37] Nina C. Bache, 'Space in *The English Patient*', MA thesis (Oslo: University of Oslo, 2004), p. 32.

Her encounter with the English patient, however, changes this conflict. She can now project her feelings of loss onto him instead and take care of him as she would have done for her father. Still, she does miss Canada and her stepmother: 'All through the last year in Italy she has carried the letters from Clara. […] But she has never answered them. She has missed Clara with a woe but is unable to write to her, now, after all that has happened to her. She cannot bear to talk of or even acknowledge the death of Patrick' (p. 98). The letters bear witness to her wish for communication with Clara, but her inability to cope with the death of her father stays her hand and keeps her in Europe where she heals her wounds in the villa while caring for the patient. The similarities, then, between the condition of the garden and the patient may also be an indicator of her belonging to the house. Like the body of the patient, the earth of the garden is burnt and without nutrition. It takes considerable effort to make something grow, but Hana is dedicated to her work as a nurse and sees the possibilities for life to grow. Read allegorically, Hana's garden seems to become an image of a ruined Europe where her role as a nurse is to find ways to heal the burnt earth and create a new beginning.

The image of Hana nursing a ruined Europe may be further supported by Caravaggio's description of the garden of the villa as ruined: 'The fountain gurgling in the background, the hawks, the ruined garden of the villa. Maybe this is the way to come out of a war, he thinks' (p. 35). This image is consistent with Hana's description of the burnt earth and may be seen as a reflection of the ruined state of Europe after the war. The fountain was the gathering point of the garden, the life giving centre of the world. On a micro level, Caravaggio thinks this is a possibility 'to come out of a war', to start a new life, while on a macro level it is possible to read this as a wish to create a new beginning in the ruins of the old world. Although Caravaggio thinks the war is over, he still lingers with the past as he cannot leave the patient's identity alone. His need to interrogate the patient may be seen as an effort of revenge for when he himself was interrogated and lost his thumbs. It would seem that he comes to represent, both in the villa and in a global perspective, the last vengeful entity resulting from the war. When he has come to know the patient, though, and overcomes his need for investigation, he transforms his vengefulness into forgiveness. An important motivation for his investigation to begin with was his relation to Hana: 'He had known her and her father in Toronto before the war. Then he had been a thief, a married man, slipped through his chosen world with a lazy confidence, brilliant in deceit against the rich, or charm towards his wife Giannetta or with this young daughter of his friend' (p. 42). Even though Caravaggio is

Italian, we are told that he has lived some time in Toronto where he knew Hana's father. His sense of belonging, in other words, is scattered to include both Italy and Canada. Nevertheless, it would seem by his actions, as explained in chapter 1, that his belonging has shifted to encompass Hana, instead of any nation. Yet, Caravaggio still has a relation to Canada by means of his wife who remained in the country, but, like Hana, he has conflictive emotions concerning his home. During his time in Toronto, he had lived his life as he chose, like a thief 'with a lazy confidence'. The war, however, has changed his way of life in such a way that he could never return to that carefree world. Hence, in the villa, he considers Hana to be his new home, his way of coming out of a war.

Kip – a Colonial Hybrid

As Kip's sense of belonging to India, and thus the community he imagines himself to be a part of, has come to include England as well, he has, as noted above, to an extent become a colonial, or cultural, hybrid of the two nationalities. The term *hybrid* is defined by *Oxford English Dictionary* as 'the offspring of two animals or plants of different species, or (less strictly) varieties; a half-breed, cross-breed, or mongrel', and it can be used figuratively to explain a product 'derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements.'[38] Robert J. C. Young notes that the first definition was common in the nineteenth century, among other things referring to the result of a cross-breeding between different human races, while the second in the twentieth century gradually came to describe how people became a blend, a mixture, of different cultures.[39] The fact that Kip is not a product of cross-breeding makes the first definition irrelevant. Still, I have included it in the discussion because I found it necessary to look at the difference between a racial hybrid and a cultural one. In this case, the second definition is of interest as the object of hybridity is not organic, or racial, but rather the result of a mixture of cultures. The cultural hybrid, that is, has undergone a change of belonging where his loyalty to his imagined community includes two or more cultures, and hence relates to both at the same time. As noted in the introduction, Homi K. Bhabha uses the term 'colonial hybrid' to explain the hybridization of cultures in colonized countries. Accordingly, the postcolonial presence in the novel would seem to make

[38] *Oxford English Dictionary,* entry: 'hybrid', n. and adj., second edition, 1989; online version March 2012. http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/89809 (accessed 24 April 2012).
[39] Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 6.

it more natural to use Bhabha's term in this analysis. In the case of Kip, it can be argued that he has assimilated his Indian identity with English culture through his experiences in the British army and his stay in England. One significant piece of evidence for this is his change of name from Kirpal Singh to Kip: 'He had no idea what a kipper was, but the young Sikh had been thereby translated into a salty English fish. Within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten. He hadn't minded this. Lord Suffolk and his demolition team took to calling him by his nickname, which he preferred to the English habit of calling people by their surname' (pp. 93-4). Kip does not know what his nickname means, and he does not make any effort to find out. Instead, he passively accepts being named after 'a salty English fish'. Furthermore, he even prefers the nickname rather than being called by his surname. However, there is a hint of violation in Kip's renaming. Though he accepts the name change, it is done by people he does not know. They discard his Indian identity and rename him according to their preferences. The colonialist authority represented in the renaming thus replaces Kip's Indian representation through his original name with an English one. The renaming seems to have certain similarities to what Bhabha notes on colonial hybridization.[40] By changing Kip's name, the colonialist authority removes an important cultural trait, consequently discriminating Indian naming. Kip now no longer identifies himself as Indian, but due to his race and cultural background, he is not English either. Kip further appropriates Englishness when he finds a connection between Indian folklore and English during Lord Suffolk's description of the murder of Lorna Doone: 'To Singh it sounded like a familiar Indian fable' (p. 197). Kip relates to the story and finds parallels to Indian fables. As Kip finds a connection between the two cultures, this also gives him reason to merge them together and consequently becoming a hybrid of the two.

By becoming a colonial hybrid, it is also, in my opinion, possible to say that Kip develops a 'false consciousness'. By the term 'false consciousness' I am referring to Timothy J. Reiss's explanation of the term. According to Reiss, 'false consciousness' is created when a person's identity is no longer changing, but restricted by 'specifiable conditions', hence the person will develop a self-perception that may go against his or her best interests to begin with.[41] Since his identity changes from being Indian to including an English identity as well, Kip arrives at a point where his identity as Indian is restricted by his new identity markers as

[40] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 159.
[41] Timothy J. Reiss, 'Mapping Identities: Literature, Nationalism, Colonialism', in *Debating World Literature,* ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 110-47 (p. 121).

being English. This transformation started as early as when he decided to enlist in the British army, and may be said to have peaked in the company of Lord Suffolk. He comes to value English culture more than his Indian one and consequently goes against what would have been in his best interest in India, such as following his family's tradition of becoming a doctor instead of enlisting. His appropriation of an English accent when he speaks is an indication that he values the English before his Indian identity. Kip's English identity has become stronger than his Indian one. So much so that he is willing to suppress his original identity. The English identity may, in other words, be termed as 'false consciousness' because he has developed an identity which is not true to his identity as Indian. Even so, this 'false consciousness' is only applicable to a certain degree as Kip at all times keeps in mind that he is different from the English: 'He sensed he would be admitted easily if it were not for his race. He had come from a country where mathematics and mechanics were natural traits' (p. 200). Kip has finished an exam in order to be admitted as a sapper in Lord Suffolk's team and though he has finished before any of the others and has excelled in his work, he still reflects on the fact that he is of a different race. Accordingly, it is expected that his work, and results, are exceptional and that his dedication is unprecedented. Only then can he be evaluated in line with the English sappers. In addition, the fact that Kip went against his family's tradition may not directly indicate that he does so in favour of an English identity, but rather because he has a different view of authorities. Where his brother saw oppression, Kip saw reason. For instance, when Kip enlisted the officers wrote on their bodies with chalk in order to sort them into units: 'I did not feel insulted by this. I am sure my brother would have been, would have walked in fury over to the well, hauled up the bucket, and washed the chalk markings away. I was not like him. Though I loved him. Admired him. I had this side to my nature which saw reason in all things' (p. 213). Instead of being insulted, Kip sees the reason for the markings as being beneficial for organizing the recruits into units according to physical aptness and intellectual abilities. He also sees a reason for becoming acquainted with English culture, and thus come to understand the colonial powers better in order to see the reasons for their actions. Though Kip is aware that he can never be a 'true' Englishman, I would still argue that he develops a 'false consciousness' as he continues to serve in the army despite his own reasoning that his race is inferior to the English, or rather white people: 'He was accustomed to his invisibility. In England he was ignored in the various barracks, and he came to prefer that' (p. 209). Even though he was accepted into the company of Lord Suffolk and his team, Kip was still an outsider in the army, ignored by his fellow soldiers because of his race.

However, he also ‘came to prefer’ the invisibility. By leaving him alone, he was able to make himself a career as a sapper and travel with the army across Europe, learning about Western civilization.

Although Kip says that he ‘came to prefer’ the invisibility in the barracks, he still wishes to be befriended and create relations to the people of a culture he has come to love. When he is accepted into the company of Lord Suffolk, he feels welcome: ‘Kirpal Singh had been befriended, and he would never forget it’ (p. 199). The open-mindedness of Lord Suffolk included Kip as part of his group, regardless of race. Friendship, then, is important to Kip as the people who befriended him were of such a quality that race and different cultural backgrounds became of little importance. Furthermore, Kip’s experience of being befriended by Lord Suffolk and being ignored in the barracks, has taught him to trust ‘only those who befriended him’ (p. 209). Therefore, if a person was willing to be his friend and create a relation, then this person would be worthy of his trust and loyalty in return. If, in contrast, no one cared to befriend him, then they were not worthy of his attention either. Even though Kip is willing to be befriended and understand the others better, he is, with the exception of Lord Suffolk and his team, met with ignorance and prejudice. In the novel, Kip’s Indianness makes him a representative of the East in England; hence he represents a part of the world which may be willing to understand the West, but which is not met with a mutual interest. Moreover, this type of representation is in accordance with Edward W. Said’s explanation of the Oriental as ‘Other’, where Kip is excluded from the company of the English soldiers. By creating relations and friendship, this ‘Otherness’ may be replaced by a sense of understanding of each other instead of an alienation of what is different from oneself. This understanding is hinted at in the company of Lord Suffolk where Kip was included despite his ‘Otherness’. The death of Lord Suffolk, however, brought an end to the possibility of a mutual understanding as it lead to Kip’s retreat into the anonymity of the army. Still, Kip’s hybridity would suggest, as Bhabha notes, that the ‘Other’ is more complex than the mere binary opposition represented in the inclusion or exclusion in the army. One might say that Kip represents an ‘Other’ which the English cannot quite recognize due to his appropriation of Englishness which is imposed on an appearance of Indianness. Bhabha explains that the hybridity makes the colonialist authority less prevalent as this authority can no longer base its superiority on another culture’s inferiority. To put it differently, the colonized culture has appropriated cultural traits from the colonialist authority in such a way that the authority cannot recognize the original traits of the

colonized culture.[42] They have been replaced by its own cultural characteristics. This may be applicable to Kip as being a complex colonial hybrid. Although he was welcomed into the company of Lord Suffolk as an equal, he was still an 'Other' that needed to constantly prove his worth so as not to be cast out and replaced by a white soldier.

The idea of Kip as a representation of the East seeking friendship and contact in the West may also be seen in relation to Elizabeth Kella's discussion of how Kip fills a space in-between East and West where he tries to balance the colonial powers of the West and the occupied East.[43] I find this reading plausible as he seems to have assimilated Indian and English culture and merged as a hybrid of the two. Furthermore, the fact that Kip keeps to himself in his own tent outside the villa signals his function as a negotiator between two parts where he refuses to take sides. During the war he was not only disarming bombs as a sapper, but also building bridges, among other things. Because he is associated with two different cultures, disarms bombs, and builds bridges, Kip may be said to function as a bridge between East and West in order to make an effort at reconciliation and mutual understanding. In addition, Kip also functions as a connection between the inhabitants of the villa and the outside world: 'He will come into the house to pass on whatever information he has picked up that he thinks might be interesting to them' (p. 80). By listening to the radio, he gathers information about what happens in the world at large and passes it on to his friends in the villa, thus bridging the gap between the small community and the rest of the world. This, in my opinion, further implies his role as mediator in the novel, not only by passing on information from the radio, but by being a colonial hybrid of East and West. Also, the radio itself functions as a link to the rest of the world. According to Benedict Anderson, the formation of an imagined community is based on, among other things, the use of media as a way to create belonging across distances.[44] In this case, the radio may seem to function as a media to connect the small community in the villa with the rest of the world, hence supporting the image of an imagined global community in the novel.

[42] Bhabha, p. 163.
[43] Elizabeth Kella, 'Beloved Communitites: Solidarity and Difference in Fiction by Michael Ondaatje, Toni Morrison, and Joy Kogawa,' *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia*, 110 (2000), p. 99.
[44] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 43.

The Nationless Patient

The fact that Almásy refuses any nationality does not mean that he does not have one. Although little is said about his past, or where he came from, he gives a hint about his childhood early in the novel while describing how the Bedouins made use of him to name weapons they had found in the desert:

> When he was a child he had grown up with an aunt, and on the grass of her lawn she had scattered a deck of cards face down and taught him the game of Pelmanism. Each player allowed to turn up two cards and, eventually, through memory pairing them off. This had been in another landscape, of trout streams, birdcalls that he could recognize from a halting fragment. A fully named world. (p. 22)

His nationality is not mentioned, but it is an early memory from 'another landscape', different from the war-stricken desert he values so much. The contrast of the game, where the players have to remember the position of the cards in order to pair them up, with the task Almásy is set to do blindfolded, is what brings this memory forth. Moreover, it juxtaposes the belonging Almásy felt before his experiences in the desert with whom he has become. It is a good memory of his childhood: he grew up with his aunt, they played games and the world he lived in was a 'fully named world', it was safe and familiar. As it was a world he knew, a world with familiar names, might have been the trigger to his urge for adventures in the desert. It might have been his source of inspiration to explore unknown worlds, or rather, unknown to him at least. Still, the 'fully named world' of his childhood is, in this context, a stark contrast to the reality of his surroundings at the moment of remembrance. Though he is blindfolded due to his burns, his surroundings are still familiar and known to him. However, the playfulness of the setting is changed. It is no longer a game of cards, but a matter of life and death. It seems natural, in any case, that he has had, at some point, a sense of belonging to the place where he grew up and to the people he grew up with. Even though he may have felt a belonging to his aunt and her home, he still changes his identity and consequently also his sense of belonging, as is shown by his hatred towards the concept of nations. This kind of change may be seen in relation to Stuart Hall's view of cultural identity as having an origin and a history. In short, it also changes in time as people develop and acquire new preferences: it is not only about 'being' in the past, but also about 'becoming' in the future.[45]

[45] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, a Reader,* ed. Padmini Mongia (London: Arnold, 1996), 110-21 (p. 112).

The change of perspective on nations in Almásy's case is the result of a series of events that happened during his travels in the desert. Here, he experienced the force of nature and weight of history, and both the insignificance as well as the restrictions of national identity. During his travels he found rock engravings proving that the Saharan desert had once been a sea. There were engravings of lakes and people swimming in waters: 'These were water people. Even today caravans look like a river. Still, today it is water who is the stranger here. Water is the exile, carried back in cans and flasks, the ghost between your hands and your mouth' (p. 20). The lesson he learnt is that everything changes with time by the force of nature, regardless of human interference. From having water in abundance, the desert people now have to bring water back to the desert in 'cans and flasks', a 'ghost' that evaporates if you are not careful with it. Furthermore, the evidence of this was littered all over the desert in the form of harpoons and rock paintings in caves: 'In Wadi Sura I saw caves whose walls were covered with paintings of swimmers. Here there had been a lake. I could draw its shape on a wall for them. I could lead them to its edge, six thousand years ago' (p. 20). The history of the desert and its people made an impression on Almásy where he recognized the fact that though his mission was to explore unmapped territories as a cartographer and discover new routes for other travellers, it was only unknown to the white man; to the colonizing nations: 'This was a world that had been civilised for centuries, had a thousand paths and roads' (p. 149). The world they were discovering was not an unknown world. There was no need for it to be civilised by the white man as it had already been so 'for centuries', only by a different people. The weight of history and civilised culture in the desert may seem to be one of the reasons for Almásy's disgust with his own people, or the white race. Hence, Almásy also distances himself from the white man's habit of naming things already named: '*Ain, Bir, Wadi, Foggara, Khottara, Shaduf*. I didn't want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert. Still, some wanted their mark there' (p. 148). Almásy feels an aversion against such naming of places. As with the renaming of Kip, a renaming of a place also enacts an imposing of a different identity. It is a violation of the existing culture where the original name, and consequently its identity, is repressed and replaced by a different one. Chiefly, the new name is in violation with both the history of the place named and its culture. It no longer conveys the same representation of identity. Moreover, one might say that a renaming of a place also implies a change of ownership. By imposing a new name, one also, in an explicit manner, takes possession and ownership of the place named. To Almásy, the original names are 'beautiful names'

compared to his own. Therefore, one might say that he comes to loath his own name and wants to erase not only 'the family name', but also the category of nation. Nations, it would seem to Almásy, represent the source of naming. Without nations there would be no need to name and conquer other places. Consequently, the lesson Almásy learns from the desert is to become nationless and anonymous in the company of civilizations greater than his own. Nevertheless, his sentiments are not shared by his companions: 'Fenelon-Barnes wanted the fossil trees he discovered to bear his name. He even wanted a tribe to take his name, and spent a year on the negotiations. Then Bauchan outdid him, having a type of sand dune named after him. But I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from' (p. 148). His companions have no qualms of naming places, and even people, after them. Almásy, in contrast, is disgusted and distances himself from their behaviour against what he sees as historically valuable and beautiful. His own nationality and family name mean nothing compared to the beautiful names of the desert and its rich history. He no longer feels the attachment to his own country, and thus rejects his community at home. Even though Almásy has learnt to respect the history of the desert, he notices that the others have not. He treats this arrogance of his companions with a quiet contempt, not liking it, but not taking any action either: 'I pulled back the *djellaba* and there was a small Arab girl tied up, sleeping there' (p. 147). The girl is in the bed of Fenelon-Barnes, and at first Almásy thinks it is a dog lying under the sheets. Fenelon-Barnes takes advantage of his powers to violate a little girl and tie her up like an animal. The violation of the little girl may also be seen as representative of the violation done to the places being renamed. It is a show of ownership and power performed by a civilization which Almásy does not want to be associated with. Still, he remains passive to the actions of his companions.

Almásy's sense of belonging is further tested by the restrictions of nationality. Not only has his best friend killed himself because of his nationhood, but he also lost his love in the desert because he had the wrong name: 'When he got to the outskirts of the settlements, English military jeeps surrounded him and took him away, not listening to his story of the woman injured at Uweinat, just seventy miles away, listening in fact to nothing he said' (p. 266). Katharine Clifton lies wounded in a cave after her husband tried to kill her and Almásy by crashing his plane. Geoffrey Clifton died in the attempt, but Katharine would still have had a chance of survival if she had received the right care in time. However, when Almásy arrives at the British army base, he gives up his own name and claims that she is his wife. Unfortunately, this is at the time when the Second World War has broken out and hence

Almásy's name makes him into an enemy. Suddenly, nationality makes the difference of life and death, friend or enemy, regardless of one's actions. As a result, his nationality prevented Almásy from saving the woman he loved because he happened to come upon the wrong army. Although he eventually managed to make an agreement with the Germans in return for provisions in order to save Katharine, he arrives three years too late to rescue her.

Even though Caravaggio finds out, in the end, that he is a Hungarian Count, Almásy no longer seems to relate to this identity when he lies burnt and crippled in his bed in the villa. He has come to represent something other, something more than mere nationality can describe. This may also be inferred from the fact that his room is painted as a garden. He becomes the centre of it, just as the fountain is supposed to be in the centre, representing life.[46] In addition, he possesses the knowledge of cultivation: 'The English patient advices Hana on what to grow. "Get your Italian friend to find seed for you, he seems capable in that category. What you want are plum leaves. Also fire pink and Indian pink – if you want the Latin name for your Latin friend, it is *Silene virginica*. Red savory is good. If you want finches get hazel and chokecherries"' (p. 131). Not only is he the centre of his own special garden, he also knows how to take care of it, what seeds to plant and what they are called in Latin. His knowledge of Latin implies that he has had an education that goes beyond normal schooling; hence, he also acquires the weight and authority of being educated and becomes a source of knowledge and wisdom. Almásy's authority is also influenced by his experiences in the desert, from which he has developed a philosophy that every human being is equal and should be free according to his or her own preferences: 'I believe in such cartography – to be marked by nature, not just to label ourselves on a map like the names of rich men and women on buildings. We are communal histories, communal books. We are not owned or monogamous in our taste or experience. All I desired was to walk upon such an earth that had no maps' (p. 277). Almásy believes in being 'marked by nature', to experience nature and let it make an impression, instead of putting one's own name on something that is much grander than oneself. Human beings are the same, they 'are communal histories, communal books' where all life interact at some point and this requires the insight that life is to be respected and 'not owned', it is subjective in 'taste' and 'experience'. According to Kella, the English patient is a representation of 'Western humanist civilization' that takes into consideration 'the essential humanity of all peoples.'[47] This I can agree with as he denies the restrictions of

[46] Foucault, p. 98.
[47] Kella, p. 99.

nationality and instead looks at what human beings have in common. A human being is important in him- or herself, not because of his or her background, skin colour or national identity. The values represented in Western humanism may also be applicable to the process of globalization. Like humanism, globalization aims to promote shared values, such as the equality of all humans. Almásy, then, may not only represent Western humanism, but also the precarious situation of globalization.

The idea of Almásy as representing the West may also be seen in relation to his burnt body. Like Western civilization, he is crippled and dying after the damages of the war. His only remaining function is that of being able to reflect and make use of his knowledge. His projection of his self on to *The Histories* by Herodotus may also be a strong indicator of him representing the West. Then again, the book is not flawless: 'When he discovered the truth to what had seemed a lie, he brought out his glue pot and pasted in a map or news clipping or used a blank space in the book to sketch men in skirts with faded unknown animals alongside them' (p. 261). Almásy tries to fix history by amending whatever he discovers to be lies in the book. His attempts are, in my opinion, a sign of a wounded Western civilization that tries to make amends by being all-inclusive and nostalgic about its past. It is all-inclusive in that it recognizes that all human beings are equally important, something which is contradicted when the West, as an abstraction of the USA, decided to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki, however, and it is nostalgic in that it looks back at its former glory, such as the period of empire or of Greek civilization.

3 The Failure

In chapter 2 I discussed the possibility of an imagined global community lived out by the characters in the villa. This global community was based on how the characters came to represent different nationalities, with special regard to the representations of Kip and Almásy. The point of departure was Peter Madsen's definition of globalization as a process where the promotion of shared values might benefit a global community. However, Madsen also explains that globalization has different sides to it. Although it may seem to be a positive process, it may also have negative effects where it becomes 'a threat to the particular, to differences between cultural formations.' The globalization process may in some cases mean that cultures will assimilate, and create cultural, in this case colonial, hybrids such as Kip, and that some cultural traits may be replaced by others or simply discarded. Even so, Madsen further explains that this may not necessarily be a negative effect. Some cultures may in truth be better off without certain traits, such as the suppression of women or the death penalty, for instance. Still, Madsen also notes that such cultural assimilation may be seen as a threat to the cultural differences that make the original cultures so special and unique to begin with.[48] To put it another way, the cultural assimilation may erase specific characteristics of a culture, making it less different and unique. A result of this may be a loss of cultural diversity.

This chapter will look at how the characters' sense of belonging to each other fails to uphold relations both in the villa and in a global perspective. The failure comes as a response to the USA's decision to bomb the Japanese cities Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Though the characters have different reactions to the bombings, the outcome is that the Western idea of race does not seem compatible with the shared values of the small community. This could also be seen as a negative effect on the idea of a process of globalization as Western cultures would seem reluctant to discard their racial ideology in creating a global community. Hence, the bombings dissolve the community and the characters' original sense of belonging is re-established as they move away from the dream of mutuality and are driven into separateness. In order to understand the failure of belonging I will investigate how the characters react to the bombings of the Japanese cities, and how they relate to each other after the devastating

[48] Peter Madsen, 'World Literature and World Thoughts: Brandes/Auerbach', in *Debating World Literature,* ed. Christopher Prendergast (London: Verso, 2004), pp. 54-75 (p. 73).

event. It will also be relevant in this respect to look at how their original sense of belonging to their imagined communities, or nations, becomes re-established as an effect of the bombings.

Conflict of Cultures

The failure of the community to uphold relations seems to have been preceded by a series of premonitions. First, both Kip's mentor Lord Suffolk, and later his second in command Hardy, died while dismantling a bomb. They were both a connection between Kip and England, and their deaths affected his relation to England in negative ways. After the death of Lord Suffolk, Kip retreated into the anonymity of the army, while Hardy's death was a reminder of the dangerous and unpredictable nature of their work. Furthermore, Hardy was Kip's only remaining colleague from the original group of sappers educated by Lord Suffolk. For this reason, he came to be important for Kip's hold on reality: 'Only Hardy, he realized, keeps me human now' (p. 228). The dismantling of bombs is hard work, and Hardy is the only person who knows how to deal with Kip when he is in a trying situation. His caring for Kip is the only thing that keeps Kip sane and related to the West. Hardy's death is discovered by Kip while he is attending a small party in the patient's room: 'West wind coming into the room. And he turned suddenly, angry. A frail scent of cordite reaching him, a percentage of it in the air, and then he slipped out of the room, gesturing weariness, leaving Hana in the arms of Caravaggio' (p. 116). The fact that it is the 'West wind' that brings the smell of a detonated bomb into the room is, in my opinion, a premonition of what is to come later, on a larger scale in the form of atomic bombs. Second, when Hana is asked to sing the 'Marseillaise', she does so for Kip, with the purpose of showing him how to sing it: 'She was singing it as if it was something scarred, as if one couldn't ever again bring all the hope of the song together' (p. 285). The song is changed from being filled with revolutionary emotions to becoming wounded and 'scarred'. The hope that was once expressed in the song is scattered after years of warfare and devastations. This hopelessness in her manner of singing reflects the feelings of Kip: 'Caravaggio realized she was singing with and echoing the heart of the sapper' (p. 286). Kip's feelings are 'scarred' in that, as a colonial hybrid, he feels loyalty to two different nations. Moreover, because his sense of belonging is related to two cultures that cannot easily be assimilated due to their differences, the hope of reconciliation between East and West seems difficult to achieve. As the deaths of Lord Suffolk and Hardy seemed to have

diminished the strength of Kip's relation to England, his sense of belonging to the West has also been reduced. His only relation to the West, and England, at this point is the patient, whom he still thinks is English.

Kip's hope of reconciliation may be seen in relation to his interest in the art of Western civilization. This art becomes a contrast to the war in which he participates. It is a beauty he allows himself to enjoy and to study as an expression of Western humanism:

> Every night he had walked into the coldness of a captured church and found a statue for the night to be his sentinel. He had given his trust only to this race of stones, moving as close as possible against them in the darkness, a grieving angel whose thigh was a woman's perfect thigh, whose line and shadow appeared so soft. He would place his head on the lap of such creatures and release himself into sleep. (p. 110)

The art gives Kip comfort as it expresses an acceptance of who he is, regardless of his origins. He trusts the statues and sees them as a 'race of stones', a race that represents Western values. The statue in the church gives him protection against the outside world, and its image of 'a grieving angel' gives the impression of a sorrow for what is happening out there. The war is not part of the angel's ideology; the world is supposed to be a peaceful place where people live in harmony, not in war. The image of 'a woman's perfect thigh' further implies the angel's role as protector, as a mother who protects her children and nurtures them, in this case in times of war. As a result, Kip is able to 'release himself into sleep', to relax when he is at his most vulnerable. Then again, the art Kip sees also expresses different sides of human nature: 'He has his hands under his head, interpreting a new toughness in the face of the angel he didn't notice before. The white flower it holds has fooled him. The angel too is a warrior' (pp. 298-9). This angel is not a 'grieving angel', but 'a warrior'. Kip has found himself another church to lie in, one where there are painted figures of white people; of a woman who talks to an angel. The fact that the angel is 'a warrior', however, is not apparent to Kip before he lies down and sees it from a different angle. The 'white flower', which might be symbolizing peace, 'has fooled him' into believing that it was a peaceful image, when in truth it has a different meaning. The meaning implied is further suggested through the image of Kip lying at their feet: 'The tableau now, with Kip at the feet of the two figures, suggests a debate over his fate. The raised terracotta arm a stay of execution, a promise of some great future for this sleeper, childlike, foreign-born. The three of them almost at the point of decision, agreement' (p. 299). The image implies that the figures, which may represent Western art and by extension Western humanism, are at a point of decision where they discuss Kip's 'fate', where they hold the 'promise of some great future' for him. This 'great future' is only

suggested and relies on the actions of the figures, on their decision of his worthiness. It would seem by this image that Western humanism is the actor that holds the power of a future where East and West may come to an agreement. Since Kip may be considered a colonial hybrid, he becomes the symbol of this agreement. He is 'childlike, foreign-born', he is the child of imperial colonization; he was born in a different place yet claims his equality with the others.

The agreement suggested in the scene above, however, comes to an end with the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. To Kip, the bombing not only affected Japan, but all of Asia: 'If he closes his eyes he sees the streets of Asia full of fire. It rolls across cities like a burst map, the hurricane of heat withering bodies as it meets them, the shadow of humans suddenly in the air. This tremor of Western wisdom' (p. 302). The decision to bomb the Asian cities brings forth the racial perspective of the West in a light different from the one Kip experienced in the army. He could learn to live with the racial discrimination in the army, but the violence expressed in the bombing of a non-white civilization ended his passive acceptance of Western civilization. When he closes his eyes, he does not see race, but 'the shadow of humans', the very same humans Western humanism was supposed to include and encompass in its wisdom. The bombing reminds Kip of his brother's opposition to Western colonialism and his warnings against it: 'My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers' (p. 302). Though the Europeans made contracts and promises, his brother was of the opinion that Europe would act according to its own preferences, and the bombing seems to have confirmed it. The decision to bomb the cities is a betrayal of Kip's view of Western humanism. Hence, it is no wonder he lets out his fury on the one person he most closely associates with the values of the West, the patient:

> I grew up with traditions from my country, but later, more often, from *your* country. Your fragile white island that with customs and manners and books and prefects and reason somehow converted the rest of the world. You stood for precise behaviour. I knew if I lifted a teacup with the wrong finger I'd be banished. If I tied the wrong kind of knot in a tie I was out. Was it just ships that gave you such power? Was it, as my brother said, because you had the histories and printing presses? (p. 301)

Kip questions the patient about his nation's right to impose their traditions and customs on other nations. His mistake, though, is that the patient is not in fact English at all. He could not have found another person who agrees more with his arguments. Then again, Kip may not be attacking England as a nation, but the West, and Western humanism, as represented by the patient. The West 'stood for precise behaviour' and if a foreigner could not live up to that, he

would be ‘out’ of good society. He would not be welcome as an equal. When the West, through its representative the USA, bombed Japan, it also went against its own principles of ‘precise behaviour’ in Kip’s eyes. Still, there are no consequences for the misbehaviour of the West. When Kip confronts the patient, he is ready to kill him:

> The rifle sight unwavering at the burned neck. Then the sapper swerves it up towards the man’s eyes.
> Do it, Almásy says.
> The eyes of the sapper and the patient meet in this half-dark room crowded now with the world.
> He nods to the sapper.
> Do it, he says quietly. (p. 303)

Kip is angry, hurt and ready to retaliate against the West by killing the patient. In contrast, the person who was supposed to represent Englishness and the West is now identified as the Hungarian Count Ladislaus de Almásy, and he has already rejected such thoughts of racial differences and of nationhood. Almásy accepts the death of Western humanism when he hears of the atrocities on the radio and gives Kip his blessing to shoot him. On the contrary, the tension is released when Kip lowers the rifle and leaves the room: ‘Kip ejects the cartridge and catches it as it begins to fall. He throws the rifle onto the bed, a snake, its venom collected’ (p. 303). The rifle is no longer a useful tool for him; it has become ‘a snake’ which he needs to pacify by collecting ‘its venom’ so that it cannot be used by others. Instead of retaliating, Kip withdraws into himself, not communicating with anyone:

> Kip.
> He says nothing, looking through her.
> Kip, it’s *me*. What did we have to do with it?
> He is a stone in front of her. (p. 306)

Hana seeks him out to try to understand his withdrawal. She does not see the bombing as a betrayal the way Kip does, hence she does not understand why he takes out his fury on them. They had nothing to do with it, and she is still the same person. However, Caravaggio understands Kip’s reasoning: ‘He knows the young soldier is right. They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation’ (p. 304). Kip has become convinced that the Western ideology of race favours the white race above all else in such a way that it is acceptable to target a coloured nation, but never a white one, with a nuclear bomb. This division of races and the favouring of one in particular, expresses itself explicitly for Kip in this bombing. It makes him disoriented about his whereabouts: ‘In the tent, before the light evaporated, he had

brought out the photograph of his family and gazed at it. His name is Kirpal Singh and he does not know what he is doing here' (p. 305). Kip's realization that the West could treat the East with such indifference and cruelty because of race makes him break with the community in the villa. He remembers his family and his real name, Kirpal Singh, and this makes him feel out of place; he no longer knows 'what he is doing here', in Italy. By discarding his nickname, he also loses his adopted English identity and takes back his Indian one, and with it he finds back to his sense of belonging to India.

The community in the villa becomes dissolved when Kirpal withdraws from the relations he has with the other characters.[49] As Hana's sense of belonging is very much related to her relationship with Kirpal, his leaving brings back her thoughts about Canada: '*I am sick of Europe, Clara. I want to come home. To your small cabin and pink rock in Georgian Bay*' (p. 314). Her sense of belonging in the villa does not have much meaning after Kirpal left; she has had enough of the misery in Europe and is ready to come home to her stepmother. This also means that she is ready to talk again about her father, and to face the memories in Canada and the pain of his death. The return of the memories she has of Canada, of a '*small cabin and pink rock*', fills her with a longing for her home in Canada and seems to weaken the belonging she has to the villa and the patient. Also, even though she takes care of the patient, he will eventually die of his condition and the meaning she has found in caring for him will be lost: 'In the future, if and when the patient dies, Caravaggio and the girl will bury him. Let the dead bury the dead. He has never been sure what that meant. Those few callous words in the Bible' (p. 304). The biblical proverb of 'Let the dead bury the dead' seems to reflect the situation of the characters left in the villa. They may not be dead, but they are of a dying community in which belonging has failed to uphold relations. Hana and Caravaggio are the last to represent the West in this community, and after they have buried the patient, they will most likely leave the villa. Life must go on. Although the patient may die, the Western humanism represented in him may yet survive. Its survival is further implied in the book by Herodotus: 'They will bury everything except the book. The body, the sheets, his clothes, the rifle. Soon he will be alone with Hana. And the motive for all this on the radio. A terrible event emerging out of the short wave. A new war. The death of a civilization' (p. 304). As Western humanism is represented through the patient, and the patient has projected his own identity onto the book, the book becomes a symbol of Western humanism and what the patient believed in. However, there is also a 'new war' to deal with. Not a world war, but a

[49] From this point on, I will call Kip by his Indian name Kirpal.

cold war where the nations that survived the Second World War, and triumphed in it, put up a cold front to each other and raced for power, both political and military. The question, then, is whether Western humanism will survive this 'new war'. As Kirpal leaves and the patient dies, Caravaggio 'will be alone with Hana' and he reflects that 'all this', the dissolving of their little community and consequently the idea of a global community, is the result of news 'emerging out of the short wave', news about something that happened far away, but which still had a huge impact on their little circle.

A Memory?

The dissolving of the group in the villa changed the characters' sense of belonging where they all, except for the patient, returned to their respective countries, leaving the Italian countryside as a memory of what could have been. Rachel D. Friedman notes that the re-establishment of Kip's Indian identity 'seems to undo the rest of the novel's postcolonial move towards a counter-nationalism and a model of identity not based on the lethal category of the nation.'[50] The unity in the villa, then, seems to become undone by the re-establishment of national consciousness in the community. Kirpal's sense of belonging to the community started to change when he first heard of the bombing and the shock of it drove him to confront the patient and take back his real name. This development continues when he leaves the villa on a motorbike and during his travel to India: 'It began to rain and he stopped to put on a rubber cape. He walked around the machine in the wetness. Now, as he travelled, the sound in his ears changed. The *shush shush* replacing the whine and howl, the water flung onto his boots from the front wheel' (p. 312). He has arrived at Ortona where he almost drowned in the river during a storm while assisting other sappers with building bridges. The memory is terrifying, but the rain may be said to cleanse him of it, and the sound of water on his boots drives away 'the whine and howl' of the storm. Kirpal is being reborn on his travels as the person he was before he entered the army. Though the thought of Hana still pervades his mind, he intentionally wills it away: 'When her face appeared he erased it, pulled the handlebars so he would swerve and have to concentrate' (p. 312). He refuses to let his attachment to her change his mind; he returns to India. The idea of Kirpal being reborn can also be seen in relation to

[50] Rachel D. Friedman, 'Deserts and Gardens: Herodotus and *The English Patient*', *Arion*, 3rd ser., 15: 3 (Winter 2008), 47-84 (p. 49).

the route he takes on his way home: 'He was travelling against the direction of the invasion, as if rewinding the spool of war, the route no longer tense with military' (p. 308). As he visits places he has seen and been to as a sapper in the British army, he also sheds the British identity he has gained through his experiences. The places are different; they are 'no longer tense with military', and neither is he. The oppressiveness of war is gone and the road ahead is calm and secure. Still, though Kirpal's sense of belonging changes and he reclaims his original identity as Indian, some impressions still linger with him on his journey: 'He feels he carries the body of the Englishman with him in this flight. It sits on the petrol tank facing him, the black body in an embrace with his, facing the past over his shoulder, facing the countryside they are flying from, that receding palace of strangers on the Italian hill which shall never be rebuilt' (p. 312). Kirpal is carrying the memory of Western civilization and humanism with him on his journey, a memory represented by 'the body of the Englishman'. The description of the patient as a 'black body' and the use of the pronoun 'It' instead of *he* implies a dehumanization of the patient. Instead of a person, he has become a burnt corpse clinging to Kirpal as he leaves the Italian countryside behind on his way home. They are interlocked 'in an embrace', but where Kirpal looks towards his future, the body looks to 'the past' of what was and could have been in the villa. Even so, the community they shared 'shall never be rebuilt', what could have been will never be. It is a lost cause and the friends Kirpal made in the villa are yet again 'strangers' to him. He does not know them as he thought he did, and this realization has made them into strangers to whom he has little, if any, sense of belonging or commitment. Nevertheless, the embrace in this image may also be one of reconciliation. Elizabeth Kella argues that 'the symbolic embrace between East and West, young and old, future and past reconciles and overcomes the racial and national differences previously identified as covertly integral to Western civilization.'[51] I can agree with this to a certain extent. The image Kella portrays is peaceful. The black body of the patient comes to represent all races of the world; it is so burnt that no specific race is discernible. Thus, he represents both the aggressors and the victims of war. As Kirpal represents the East and the patient the West, the embrace may be seen as a reconciliation of their differences. However, I would argue that this is only relevant in the case of Kirpal. He is the one who has reconciled 'East and West, young and old, future and past' in himself, internally. This does not necessarily mean that there is a reconciliation between East and West. The reason for Kirpal

[51] Elizabeth Kella, 'Beloved Communitites: Solidarity and Difference in Fiction by Michael Ondaatje, Toni Morrison, and Joy Kogawa,' *Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia*, 110 (2000), p. 109.

leaving the community in the villa in the first place is due to his perception that the West favours white people before non-white. The reconciliation failed and the community suffered because of it.

Little is said in the conclusion of the novel of Caravaggio's whereabouts after the thirteen years of separation. Still, there is an earlier hint that he would be alone with Hana when the patient dies. Accordingly, it would be natural to think that he goes with her to Canada. Though Hana's sense of belonging to Canada was re-enforced and she moved back to her stepmother in Georgian Bay, she is still restless: 'She, at even this age, thirty-four, has not found her own company, the ones she wanted' (p. 320). Her restlessness in the villa has not left her, even though she is back in her childhood home. She has not found 'the ones she wanted' in Canada as her father is dead and Kirpal left her for India. The two persons she wanted with her are gone and this makes her belonging to Canada incomplete and unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, she is an attractive woman: 'She is a woman of honour and smartness whose wild love leaves out luck, always taking risks, and there is something in her brow now that only she can recognize in a mirror. Ideal and idealistic in that shiny dark hair! People fall in love with her' (p. 320). She has grown through her experiences in Europe to become 'a woman of honour and smartness'. Her position in Canada bears witness of luxury and excess. She is portrayed as 'ideal and idealistic', loved by the people around her. In contrast, there is nothing in this section implying her mutual affection. Instead, 'her brow' suggests a secret, or perhaps a memory from the past, which only she can see. This may imply that her position in society is not enough for Hana. After all, she remembers her belonging to the other characters in the villa and the failure of their community.

As Hana remembers Kirpal, he also remembers her. He has found his place in India and followed his family's tradition in becoming a doctor, and he is married and has two children. Yet, he also thinks back to the time in the villa:

> Where does he sit in his garden thinking once again he should go inside and write a letter or go one day down to the telephone depot, fill out a form and try to contact her in another country. It is this garden, this square patch of dry cut grass that triggers him back to the months he spent with Hana and Caravaggio and the English patient north of Florence in the Villa San Girolamo. (p. 318)

The memory of their belonging still echoes across the years and makes them think of each other. Furthermore, Kirpal remembers his time with Hana and the others while sitting 'in his garden', the place where the world comes together. This 'triggers' his memory of a promise made in a different garden, the one occupied by the patient. A promise made by Western

civilization of equality across race and nationality, but which failed in the end because of the actions of a Western nation. Though Kirpal thinks of contacting Hana, to ‘write a letter’ or call her, he never does. They live separate lives, she ‘in another country’, and the distance is too great to cross. Then again, despite the distance, Hana and Kirpal interact one last time across space: ‘And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair. Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal’s left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of his eyes behind his spectacles’ (p. 321). Time and space in both places happen to correspond in such a way that it would seem Kirpal saves the glass Hana dislodged, but in truth it is his daughter’s fork he catches. The interaction would seem to be a reflection of previous times, a memory of their time together in the villa. However, the glass is not saved. Though nothing is said of what happens to it, it seems reasonable to assume that it is shattered, since no one is there with Hana to catch it. The fork, though, is saved and passed ‘into the fingers of his [Kirpal’s] daughter’ who is part of the next generation, one that may help heal the conflicts between cultures and restore the promise of a better future.

Conclusion

The overall purpose of this thesis has been to examine the characters' sense of belonging in *The English Patient*. Through my analysis I found that each of the characters had, in various degrees, a wounded sense of belonging when they arrived at the villa. This wounded belonging was essentially tied to their imagined communities as explained by Benedict Anderson. As part of their healing process, the characters formed ties of belonging to each other in a way reminiscent of a family, thus transcending the limits of belonging to their nations. However, each individual's sense of belonging was in the end not easily healed. The community in the villa also seemed to convey a global perspective. In this perspective, the representations of East and West, and a hope of reconciliation after the war, seem to be indications of a belonging that transcends mere nationality and builds an image of global unity. To return, then, to my initial question: *how is the characters' sense of belonging problematized in the novel and how does it affect the various levels of community?*

From my investigation it would seem that the characters' belonging is problematized through the showing up of a lack of direction, or meaning, in their lives. This is, perhaps, most visible in the case of Hana. Her vagrancy in the villa and her sense of alienation in Kip's tent suggest that she is at a loss of direction. Although she longs for Canada at times, she has an aversion against going home. Therefore, she moves around in the villa in search of her own place. Though she finds it to a certain degree in her relationship with Kip, she feels, even in his tent, that she is intruding upon someone else's world. At the same time, she seems to have a sense of belonging in her caring for the patient. He has become the meaning in her life and caring for him eases the pain she suffered from losing her father to the war. Her belonging to the patient seems absolute, and her disinterest in his identity forms the background for her own philosophy, one in which the past is not important. It is the present and the future that matter. Only in the present may the characters find healing and reclaim their future, not in the past. Her refusal to give in to Caravaggio's insistence on the identity of the patient, may confirm this, and, in the end, even Caravaggio comes to see the meaninglessness of his obsession. One of Caravaggio's motives for his interrogation of the patient was his sense of belonging to Hana. His loyalty to her, supported perhaps by his sense of justice, created his need to find out the patient's identity. Caravaggio's sense of belonging seems, in other words,

to be problematized through his need to find out about the identity and belonging of other people. By focusing on others, he may forget his own troubles for a time.

In my analysis of Kip's sense of belonging I found a complex cultural identity where his belonging appears to be problematized in his relation to two nations at the same time. His suppression of his Indian identity in favour of an English one results in a colonial hybrid of the two. However, he does not completely forget that he also belongs to India. He still keeps to his own faith and remains an outsider, an 'Other', in the company of the British. Kip's tent may, in this respect, function as a visible marker of his sense of 'Otherness' and his wish to stay separated from the rest. I found the distance Kip keeps to the other characters and the fact that he frequently uses his rifle sights to observe Western culture, to be similar to the role of an observer. He observes the other characters, and their culture, in order to make up his own mind. This, along with his sense of belonging to both India and England, establishes the idea of Kip as a mediator between East and West.

The idea of Kip as mediator seems to be further implied in his relation to the English patient. Through his extensive knowledge and his projection of his self onto the book *The Histories* by Herodotus, the patient seems to become a representation of the West, both as Western civilization and as its idea of humanism. This appears to be strengthened by his lack of national identity and his aversion against nations in general. Almásy's wish to be nationless seems to be his personal solution to his loss of belonging to a specific country. During his explorations in the desert, and his experiences with the restrictions imposed by national borders, he has come to hate nations. He talks of this aversion against nations to the other characters, instead advocating ideas of Western humanism.

The formation of a family in the villa would for a while seem to have given the characters the direction and sense of meaning they needed in order to heal their wounds from the war. This notion of family could, in addition, be projected onto a global perspective of unity between nations. Still, though the characters were all committed to each other to some degree, their sense of belonging to the community of the villa did not survive the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This event affected both the local level of community, and in turn the idea of a community at a global level. The 'family' became scattered as Kip left for India and consequently the global unity became dissolved by the withdrawal of the East and the mediating function represented by Kip. The dissolving of the community in the villa and the characters' return to their home countries in the end only leave them with the memory of what once had been. The relations and possibilities represented in the community came to naught

as world events caught up with them and tested their belonging with fatal consequences. This memory of their belonging haunts Kip and Hana at the end of the novel, hinting at new possibilities and signs of a better future represented in Kip's daughter. It is now up to the younger generations to heal the wounds left by their parents in the aftermath of a devastating world war and, hopefully, to form new ties of belonging and reconciliation across borders.

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